

# BUCKSKIN AND BLACKBOARD

# Buckskin and Blackbeard

by

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**TO THE  
CHILDREN OF BIG BAR CREEK**



## *Chapter I*

### FROM MALVERN HILLS TO ROCKY MOUNTAINS

I STOOD on the pavement savouring the strangeness of the place, ringed with the treeless, grey-green mountains. I watched an eagle flying over a mountain top. I heard the swish of the waves in the Thompson River, rushing below on its way to the Fraser, and the clanging bell of the freight train passing through a few yards away on tracks level with the roadway. I smelt the all-pervading scent of the sage. This was the threshold of adventure, and I knew it. The despondency of recent years slipped from me and I felt again that tingling sense of anticipation which is generally the prerogative of youth.

The conductor's announcement that we were running into Ashcroft had awakened me from sleep. A few moments later I had stepped off the Canadian trans-continental bus into the chill morning air of this mountain village. Inside the bus office I asked if anyone could give me the address of the School Board Secretary—though five o'clock in the morning was rather early for a social call.

"You want Nick Mattick," they said. "Sure! We'll ring him up for you."

They took off the receiver and said, "Give me Nick Mattick! No; he won't be at his office at this time of day. Try the house!"

After a brief conversation, they told me that Nick was

in bed, but would be down to meet me in a few minutes. In due course he arrived in a big Oldsmobile car. He used a crutch, and I was told later that he had left a leg on the Normandy beaches. I learned that I was still eighty miles or more from my school, but nobody seemed to be in a particular hurry for me to get there and I spent a leisurely day around town.

Nick was a six-footer and, like all men in the neighbourhood, wore a ten-gallon hat. This was cowboy country. He took me to his home and I had breakfast with his wife and family: then we discussed the terms of my appointment as a rural teacher. I found my rate of pay was double what I had received in England, and as my allowance was now almost exhausted I was very glad to receive an advance of \$100 out of my first month's pay. There were certain prohibitions which I must observe: I must not, for instance, expound Scripture to my pupils, though I was required to recite with them the Lord's Prayer at the beginning of morning school, and to read the appropriate passages of the Bible prescribed for the day. If I found it necessary to give corporal punishment, I was restricted to the use of the strap provided by the School Board.

Later in the day, we went to the hotel where I was to spend a couple of nights. This came up to expectations magnificently: besides the tourists travelling by car who stopped there for meals there were cowboys and Indians sloping in and out in colourful attire, and old men sitting ranged in chairs along one wall within reach of the spittoon. In the evening, when four cowboys abreast came wheeling round the corner of the street in a cloud of dust and leapt from their horses. I was ready to drop

behind the nearest piece of furniture, anticipating gun-play. But the modern cowboy carries a gun only to shoot the coyotes. It was difficult to distinguish cowboys from Indians in many cases; they were both equally bronzed and wore the same kind of clothes—and I was thrilled by them all.

Ashcroft on a summer day is a very pleasant place. No matter how hot it is, there is always a breeze blowing up from the galloping waters of the Thompson River. The sandy streets are bordered by wooden sidewalks leading to neat white houses, whose wide-open windows are screened by wire gauze and shaded by colourful awnings. In the gardens rotating hoes play on the lawns. There is a well-stocked Chinese store at one end of the town, where courteous and efficient service is given and the accounts are reckoned by an ancient Chinese man using an 'abacus'. The Chinese and Indian and white children play together in the dust, and the teen-agers, wearing the latest American-style 'jeans' and checked shirts, lounge about the stores or wait at the station for their piles of newspapers when the trans-continental train is due. At the other end of the town there is a tomato-canning factory which provides summertime employment for many of the Indians in the area. The field tomatoes grown near Ashcroft are enormous, sweet, juicy fruit, and the local housewives bottle their own for use during the winter.

Mrs. Mattick took me to meet John and Monica, two young English friends of hers. John had been stationed in Canada during the war and had decided to take up the practice of law there after he married, so Monica had brought the two children out and they had made their

home in Ashcroft. We took the children for a walk along the river bank. I found that here you could not wear open-toed sandals because of the little cushions of prickly-pear cactus which abounded. It was wiser also to keep to the path, since we were on the borders of rattlesnake country.

The next morning Mrs. Mattick took me shopping. Although her husband had expressed no misgivings about my suitability for this rural post, I could see that she had some apprehension on my behalf. I came to appreciate this when I had had some experience of the sort of life I was embarking upon. But for the moment ignorance was bliss, and the fact that I knew nothing of the art of cooking, for instance, that I had never had to cope with a wood-burning stove (or any other sort of stove) and had no practical knowledge of how to roast a joint or bake a cake did not daunt me. At Mrs. Mattick's recommendation, I bought a huge box of groceries—luxuries, they seemed to me after the years of rationing in England—and a pressure cooker, and these were loaded into the boot of the car which was to take me out to my new school the following morning.

We left Ashcroft soon after breakfast—Nick and I, John and Monica, the groceries, and stacks of old newspapers put in by Mrs. Mattick. I wondered if these were included to provide reading material for me. Across the river the road twisted and spiralled above the Thompson Canyon. Sometimes the car went swinging so perilously near the edge of the precipice that I trembled lest we should meet a bus coming unexpectedly round the corner. The next time I travelled by this road was when I was on

my way out to Vancouver at Christmas-time. Then I was in the bus coming down the mountain in the dark, and as we turned a corner we suddenly saw the tiny points of the street lights of Ashcroft far below us, sparkling in the frosty air, criss-crossing in lines at right angles like the dotted lines of a map grid. Now we were soaring upwards, until the gradient levelled out, and a few miles further on we came to Cache Creek, on the old Cariboo Trail. All that remains now to link it with the Gold Rush days is the exhibit set out by the roadside, the wagon wheels and other relics, and the picture postcards in the little store. The Trail is now a super-highway to Clinton, Hundred-mile House, Quesnel and the north.

The big car purred away the miles—alongside the Boruparte River; past rolling ranch-lands; overtaking occasional Indians on horseback. The countryside was becoming more forested, and coloured rocks shining in the sunlight bordered the road. After about forty miles we left the main road at the approach to the town of Clinton, which Nick said would be my nearest shopping centre. I asked how far we were from Big Bar Creek and he said, 'About fifty miles.' But they were no ordinary fifty miles. We were travelling on a narrow earth road that did not run straight for more than a few yards at a time—bordering lakes; climbing through little gorges; shut in by forests; opening into clearings where a group of log cabins labelled, perhaps, 'L. & P.,' or 'Circle K,' indicated a guest ranch for hunters who came in the fall in search of deer and moose—and, as the journey progressed, encircled by endless miles of forested mountain ranges. I was seething with excitement; if a deer or a bear had



crossed our path the picture would have been complete. But I had to be content with the sight of whitened moose antlers lying among the berry patches, and by an unexpected meeting with three real cowboys dressed authentically in stetsons, chaps and spurs, with lariats slung on the saddle horns.

At 4,000 feet above sea-level we came upon a little oasis of smiling meadows and picturesque log buildings, known as 'Jesmond,' or the 'Mountain House.' Here the Coldwell family—Mr. and Mrs. Coldwell Senior, with their son Pete and his wife and young family—run a guest ranch, cattle ranch, store and post office. I made a mistake in pronunciation, which had to be corrected. I referred to the 'rahnch,' and was told that hereabouts the pronunciation is 'ranch' (the 'a' as in 'and'). A 'rahnch' is maintained by the wealth of its owner: a 'ranch,' on the other hand, has to maintain its owner in a style according to the amount of work he puts into it. And ranching is very hard work indeed! Mr. Coldwell, who emigrated from Newcastle-upon-Tyne about forty years ago and built up the business through the years, took down my grocery order. He explained that Pete brought mail and groceries down the valley of Big Bar Creek once a week on Thursday mornings, and took outgoing mail back with him. There was a party telephone line connecting Jesmond with Clinton, but as my school was eleven miles down the valley, and I had no means of transportation, I wondered what I should do in an emergency.

We now set off on the last lap of the journey: my mind had been so much stimulated by the variety of scenery

presented by the trip so far that I was prepared for anything. A few hundred yards beyond Jesmond the road forked: to the right lay the O.K. Ranch and, far beyond, Gang Ranch; to the left, the valley of Big Bar Creek. Now I was getting near home, and I sat up with renewed interest to survey the country. For a mile or so the road ran fairly level, bordered by the interminable forests: then it began to drop suddenly, and in a succession of horrifying curves it descended rapidly, to straighten out at the bottom alongside green pastures and an occasional log cabin.

We swung round yet another curve of the mountain road and Nick stopped the car abruptly. In the road ahead of us was an Indian boy ten or eleven years old, in a blue shirt and broad-brimmed hat, astride a big buckskin horse. The pair of them made such a picture in the golden light of the afternoon sun that I was filled with delight.

"Hello, Michael!" said Nick. "This is your new teacher. She's come all the way from England."

Michael gave a nod of acknowledgement and scrutinised me with a long, silent look, making no response to my greeting. When we had passed I said, "If all my pupils are as picturesque as that one I am going to be very lucky!"

The valley now widened, though it was still enclosed by mountain ranges: the bed of the creek, down across the sage on our left, was marked by the lush growth of willows, poplars and choke-cherry trees.

"Now," said Nick, "when we turn the next corner, look down to the left and you will see the school."

I leaned forward eagerly. The car churned up the gravel

as it swung round again, and I looked down towards the creek. Deep in the bowl of the green mountains was a cluster of log buildings—the barn, the long, low ‘school-house’ and the ‘teacherage.’ We bumped down the track to the door and Nick gave me the keys; we made our way through the sage and the rioting tumbleweed which choked the path, and I turned the key in the lock of the first house that had ever been ‘mine.’

Inside the house I saw the rough wooden table and bench; the row of shelves against the wall; the linoleum square on the floor; the two windows with sills the depth of the logs. I went through the archway into the next room and saw the iron-framed, double bedstead; the old desk for a dressing table; the recess for hanging clothes. That was what my eye saw, but my mind leapt ahead—furnishing the windows with sprigged muslin curtains, the shelves with gay crockery and shining pans, the clothes closet and the doorway with softly draped hangings; painting the woodwork a shining white and staining the floor dark brown . . . But I did not linger: there was still the school to see.

Leaving my companions exclaiming with horror at the condition of the house, I ran across to the school and stood amazed. I felt as if I was the victim of a fantasy. Here were books and inkpots; blackboards and chalks; pens, pencils and rulers; maps desks and cupboards, but one glance through the windows proclaimed the fact that civilisation was scores of miles away. I felt completely isolated, as though I was going to teach school on a desert island, inhabited by no one but me and the children. I drew my finger through the dust on top of a desk, and

wondered what I should achieve here. But there was no time to dream.

Back at the cabin work was in full swing. My predecessor had left two months earlier, and it was obvious that since then the pack-rats had been in possession. Chewed bedding was strewn all over the floor among remnants of stale food, and the pungent smell of the animals was hard to get rid of. We all set to work forthwith: John stripped to the waist and took the axe out to the wood-pile; Nick picked up a couple of pails and set out to hack his way through the undergrowth to the creek; Monica donned an apron, and we started spring-cleaning. When the water was boiling we washed dishes and cutlery and furniture and floors. John now had a mountain of wood chopped and he brought it into the house in armfuls and stacked it neatly close to the stove. Nick went down the valley in the car to spread the news that the teacher had arrived, and he returned laden with gifts: eggs and butter and milk; marrows and lettuces and tomatoes; apples and cabbages and corn; bottled raspberries and jam. By this time bacon and tomatoes were sizzling in our frying-pan and we had our first meal since breakfast. When we had finished, dusk was approaching and my visitors had to set out on their long return journey. I stood in the cabin doorway and watched the car out of sight. When there was no longer even the hum of the engine to be heard I experienced a momentary panic: here I was marooned, thousands of miles from my friends; surrounded by emptiness and silence; dependent on my own resources; knowing nothing about the peculiar difficulties of the job.

I gave myself a shake, and went indoors to unpack.

## *Chapter II*

### THE LOG-CABIN 'TEACHERAGE'

THERE was not much I could do in the way of unpacking, as there were no drawers or hooks to accommodate my clothing. I went over to the school and collected a pile of records and reports to study so that I could have some idea of the capabilities of the children. I read the names in the attendance register: they were all either 'Grinders' or 'Higginbottoms,' except for Michael, whose surname was Dunn. That would be the boy on the buckskin horse; perhaps he was not a native of the valley. The 'Confidential Report Cards' contained information on academic achievements. The twelve pupils, ranging in age from six years to fifteen years, were distributed over six different 'grades,' or classes. All except the youngest children had been given standardised intelligence tests and their intelligence quotients were recorded: my heart sank when I saw how low in the scale they all rated. Mental retardation, I knew from experience, is apt to go hand in hand with behaviour difficulties. I prepared myself for the worst.

I was thankful to find some recipes printed on the pages of a calendar hanging on the wall, and I used one of these forthwith, making an egg custard for my meal the next day. Milk was in powdered form; mixed with the ice cold water from the creek, it was delicious. With the lettuce and cucumber and tomatoes my unknown friends had

sent me and the cheese and biscuits from my grocery box, I imagined I should do well enough. I kept finding excuses for going outside and standing on the mountainside, marvelling at this translation from the hurly-burly of city life to the silence of the mountains. Yet it was not complete silence: there was always the accompanying sound of the waters of the creek, like the roar of the sea. It was the relief from the strident voice of civilisation which I found so refreshing.

Inside, my house was snug, and I went to bed early, tired out by the long drive and the vigorous scrubbing of the afternoon. I lay for a while in the darkness, recalling some of the kaleidoscopic pictures of the last few days. I thought of my home on the Malvern Hills, where a new day would already have dawned. I looked forward to the new life which would begin tomorrow, and with a sense of happy anticipation I fell asleep.

Suddenly I was awake, wide-eyed and alert. In a flash of recollection I realised that I had forgotten to lock the door when I went to bed! What had awakened me? What time was it? I lay tense in the darkness. What was that dark shape against the wall? Had somebody walked into my house? I strained my eyes in the darkness to see if I could detect any movement. I said aloud, "Is somebody there?" and my voice startled me. After a few minutes I relaxed; I reached for the matches and lit my little paraffin chimney lamp. The dark shape turned out to be my coat hanging from a nail. I went over and locked the door--my alarm-clock said half-past two--and got into bed again. Just as I was falling asleep an extraordinary noise began above my head: it sounded as if a troupe of

circus animals' was galloping backwards and forwards across my ceiling. I decided that the pack-rats or chipmunks were having a field day, and shouted at the top of my voice to scare them. But the scuttering, scrabbling, galloping continued and I stuffed the blanket into my ears and went to sleep.

The morning sunshine woke me early and I lay listening to other peculiar sounds: heavy clumping and snuffling sounds outside. Looking cautiously through my uncurtained windows, I saw horses grazing among the sage. The kitchen fire had been out for hours, but it was soon roaring again, and I had finished breakfast and was washing my dishes on the bench by my open doorway when I saw a group of children coming up the trail towards the school. When Nick had gone down the valley to announce my arrival, I had asked him to appeal for volunteers to help scrub out the school the next day. Being the first Monday in September, this was a public holiday, and school did not start until Tuesday.

Four children were approaching—two girls and two boys. They wore gay red or blue shirts and 'jeans', and introduced themselves with spirit.

"We're the four Grinders," said Marjorie, the eldest. "This is Floyd. He's just starting school. He's six."

"No; I ain't! I'm seven!" said Floyd.

"You're not! You're six!" the others repeated.

"I'm Viva!" said the little girl, a bright, dimpled eight-year old; "and this is Ralph."

"Hi!" said Ralph.

I hid a smile and said, "Good morning, children!"

We spent a busy morning sorting and arranging books.



There were dozens of different sets of readers and library books and history and geography books, and I had yet to discover which were in current use. The children went to play in the bushes by the creek for a time before going home, and I was preparing my cheese salad when Floyd and Ralph reappeared.

"Hey, Teacher!" called Floyd. "You got a dish?"

"A dish?" I said, wondering what he wanted it for. "Yes. I think I can find one," and I produced a plate off the shelf.

"He's got a trout," said Ralph; "Do you like trout?"

My eyebrows lifted as Floyd opened a slimy fist and put on the plate a trout seven or eight inches long.

"How did you get that?" I said in amazement.

"Caught him in the creek," said Floyd.

"Do you know how to clean it?" asked Ralph.

"I think so," I said doubtfully.

"Got a sharp knife?" asked Ralph, and he slit it up the belly and pulled out the insides. Floyd opened its stomach.

"Gee! Look!" he said. "That's the grasshopper I fed him!"

I thought to myself, "There can't be much wrong with the intellects of these children."

I was on the lookout for my new pupils the next morning, when they came galloping down the trail in their broad-brimmed cowboy hats. They tethered their horses in the barn or left them to graze freely on the mountain-side, and came over to be introduced. There were only five of them that I had not already met—three Higginbottoms, Edgar, Douglas and Dick, and two Grinders of a different family, Minnie and Arthur. Relationships seemed to be rather complicated: Minnie was Edgar's



aunt, though a year younger than he. Dick, at seven years of age, was starting school for the first time; Fred Grinder and Pete Higginbottom were missing: both were working on one or other of the ranches. I was rather relieved about Pete's absence: his I.Q. was exceptionally low and I expected him to be a trial to me.

My first job was to explore the capabilities of my pupils, so I set them to working arithmetical problems from their textbooks while I went round from one to another to see how they tackled them. Behaviour was decorous, and the whole group was working quietly when Douglas created a diversion.

"There's a rat in the cupboard!" he said.

I looked at him suspiciously and asked, "How do you know?"

"I can hear it," said Douglas.

We all listened: there certainly was a rustling sound.

"Get a weapon," I said.

They all fell out of their desks, grabbed the nearest lump of wood or poker or pencil-box, and streaked for the back of the room. Edgar cautiously turned the knob and jerked the cupboard door open. For a moment there was no sign of a rat; then Douglas spotted the tip of its tail.

"There he is!" he said, and a barrage of blows rained down. The rat dodged the blows and leapt out of the cupboard. Any other children of my acquaintance would have fled screaming, but not so these children. There was a wide strip of light shining between the hinges of the open door, and the rat darted for this. Instantaneously the children slammed back the door and broke its neck

in the hinge. The speed of their reaction was further evidence to me of a lively and practical intelligence.

There was a stout blue book on the teacher's desk entitled *B.C. Programme of Studies* in which the syllabus for the teaching of every subject in every grade was prescribed, the subject in each case being divided into units. The teacher was required to teach Unit 1 in the first week, Unit 2 in the second week, and so on. The lesson notes for some of the subjects were even formulated. I assumed that this system had been devised for the benefit of young teachers without experience who might be in remote situations where they had no one on whom to call for advice.

During that first week, at the end of the day's work, I would pace backwards and forwards along the mountain-side asking myself how one could teach six classes simultaneously in one room. I knew that Canadian girls went out straight from college to teach in rural schools, where there might be thirty or forty children with an age-range as wide as mine. How on earth did they manage? In a twenty-minute spelling period, for instance, you could not teach six different sets of spelling. If you set the children to work on their own and tested them in turn, you got some queer results. This was evidently what they had all been accustomed to doing, and they could score quite highly so long as I dictated the words in the same order as those in the book, because they had learnt them by sight. They did not know how to pronounce the words and had no conception of the meaning or the use of some of them. I decided that this was not a very intelligent way of teaching spelling.

When I came to study the English syllabus for Marjorie,

who was thirteen years old, I found that she was required to read *The Lady of the Lake*, which had been the prescribed textbook for Grade 8 for some years, it seemed. The vocabulary of this work was quite beyond her and I felt that if she was forced to read it she would probably develop a distaste for good literature. So I wrote to the Inspector, describing Marjorie's background and asking if I might substitute *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, explaining that I could not teach *The Lady of the Lake* with inspiration to a girl who would find it so difficult to understand the vocabulary. The Inspector replied saying that I would find that I needed more perspiration than inspiration in rural teaching, and referring me to the *Programme of Studies*, which authorised the substitution of *The Black Arrow*, by Robert Louis Stevenson, if preferred. I found that this book was a story of the Wars of the Roses and was even more unsuitable, and—not realising that the curriculum laid down in the *Programme of Studies* was sacrosanct—I ordered *The Mill on the Floss* for her.

The Inspector also sent me standardised intelligence tests to administer to the younger children who had not had them before, so my four Grade I and Grade II pupils—Floyd and Dick, and Douglas and Arthur—struggled with the type of puzzle which had been devised to test the intelligence of American city children. They had, for instance, to 'mark the prettiest'—meaning the one which was conventionally acceptable—of three pictures of a house or of a baby, etc. Since they had never seen a house with three windows upstairs and two down, they had to ponder, and their choice, if not conventional, was as good as anyone else's. They had

to mark the correct clothing to fit the medium-sized of three dolls. If it had been a question of fitting the correct harness to a horse, they would not have had the slightest difficulty, but they were not familiar with doll's clothing. The question which demanded the greatest concentration and the nicest judgment, however, was the one in which they were required to look at a picture, and then to look at a page containing jigsaw pieces of which only some belonged to the picture, and put a mark on every piece which occurred in the original. The picture showed a boy in short pants sitting on a window-sill next to a potted tulip, blowing bubbles from a clay pipe, with other toys strewn on the floor around him. The children pored over this, debating what the strange objects might be, and wasting many of the precious thirty seconds allowed for the completion of that part of the test.

The results of the test, translated into intelligence quotient ratings for the four children, were: 93, 71, 65, 62. There was a circular accompanying the test stating that children with I.Q. between 81 and 90 were to be considered "Dull," between 71 and 80 as, "Borderline," and of 69 or under as "Feeble-minded." And so, according to instructions, I must assume that only one of the children was of normal intelligence; of the other three, one was on the borderline and two were feeble-minded. This was a distortion of the facts. Intelligence has some relation to experience: it would have been as logical to set me the task of shooting a deer and classify me as feeble-minded because I could not find a deer to shoot. How could I damn a boy scholastically, by entering on his Confidential Record Card an I.Q. of 62 when I knew

that he could use an axe with precision and effect, or cross the roaring waters of the creek on a slippery log, or herd a bunch of wayward cattle along the mountainside, anticipating their attempts to evade him with lightning judgment and expert horsemanship?

I soon found there was a naturalness of expression among the children which, though refreshing, was apt to be disconcerting. Whereas English children expected to be treated differently from adults simply because of the fact that they *were* children, my new pupils did not seem to recognise any difference between youth and age. If I imposed a prohibition on them, they demanded that I should observe the same prohibition myself. I decided this was a good thing, but my poise was shaken on the first occasion when I was challenged. I had been dissatisfied with the cleanliness of the exercise books and ordered the children to show me their hands. They looked at me questioningly, so I indicated that they were to hold their hands in front of them, palm uppermost. They did so in a wondering sort of way, and I went round to inspect. When I came to Douglas I said, sternly:

"Douglas! You have not washed your hands this morning!"

"I did so!" said Douglas indignantly. He peered at his hands, then glanced at mine. (I had been having trouble with my ball-point pen.)

"You have not washed yours!" he said.

His remark was not an 'impertinence'; it was simply a statement of fact.

It took them some time to get used to my expressions, too. One day they began to clutch at their clothing and

pull it round their waists. I asked, "What on earth is the matter?" and they replied, "You said, 'Pull yourselves together!' " If I saw a boy dreaming and said to him, "Now, get on!" he would find it difficult to restrain himself from murmuring, "Give me a horse, and I'll get on!"

I was shocked at first to find that they referred to everyone in the valley by his (or her) Christian name. I found that this had some reason, however, since kinship relations were rather complicated, and it might not be appropriate to add a title, Aunt or Uncle. I had written my own name on the blackboard the first morning, and so was rather surprised when someone asked:

"What is your name?"

"My name is Miss Taylor," I replied.

"We don't mean that," said Michael. "We mean your first name."

"My first name is Miss," I said.

"No," said Ralph. "We mean your 'given' name."

"We called the last teacher Fred," said Floyd.

I said emphatically, "My name is Miss Taylor."

The boys were particularly interested in the question of my authority.

"What would you do if we did not do what you said?" asked Pete.

"You *will* do as I say," I replied.

"We might not," said Edger.

"What would you do?" asked Fred. "You couldn't lick us!"

"I could lick you if necessary," I said; "but you know you have to do what the teacher says."

"But if we said we wouldn't," persisted Pete, "you couldn't make us."

It occurred to me that the older boys probably resented having to obey a woman, so I explained that it would not be necessary for me to have to make them obey, since they would always know in their hearts that they *ought* to do what I demanded.

Besides the professional difficulties which confronted me during the first few weeks there were also the difficulties of adjustment required by the isolation of my life. When the children had gone home at half-past three in the afternoon, I was alone until nine o'clock the next morning. Sometimes an Indian passed in the distance driving a wagon and team up the mountain road; sometimes a rancher's car or truck or a gleaming grey taxi from Clinton went down the valley and the driver would give a 'honk' and wave to me as he went by, but I had no one to talk to unless one of the children came riding by, looking for a wandering horse or cow. They rode with such ease and grace that I delighted to watch them: there was none of the artificial movement taught in schools of equitation. They either walked the horse or 'loped'; in each case their own movement was one with that of the horse. If they were riding on a saddle—not the pancake 'military' saddle, but the 'western' saddle with a saddle horn in front for the rope—they had their stirrup leathers long, so that they seemed to be standing in the stirrup. I suppose they learnt to ride as soon as they learnt to walk—if not earlier. When Floyd was about to remount one day, I committed a grave breach of etiquette:

he was only six years old and the horse seemed so enormous in comparison with the little boy that I offered my linked hands as a step to enable him to mount. Floyd looked at me contemptuously. "I don't take help from *women*!" he said witheringly, and he fetched a block of wood from the wood-pile to put beside the horse, climbed on to it and hurled himself on to his stomach across the horse's bare back. Then he wriggled into position and galloped off across the sage.

I had not time in the evenings to visit the homes of my pupils: the moment school was 'out' for the day I began my chores—chopping wood, filling lamps, carrying water. I liked to linger over the water-carrying: it was so pleasant under the golden-green canopy of the yellowing cotton-wood trees. These are tall trees with smooth trunks and little leaves, like poplars. I had asked the children if there was any likelihood that I might meet a bear on my morning and evening trips to the creek, and they had said not at this time of the year, but that the bears came around to eat the wild strawberries in June.

After the chores, I prepared supper. This meal, at six o'clock, was the main meal of the day. (There was not time in the one-hour lunch break to do more than prepare a salad or heat a can of soup.) But since I had to do all my cooking from recipes, it tended to be a slow process. After I had washed-up my supper dishes, I was fully occupied until bedtime with the preparing of lessons (for six classes in each subject!) and the correcting of English and Arithmetic exercises, and in the writing of letters. Since mail day came only once a week, it was easy to think, 'There is plenty of time to write letters,' but generally



on the night beforehand there was such an accumulation of letter-writing to be done that there was hardly time to eat.

After school on the second day I broke my can-opener. This was a serious domestic misfortune: until I replaced it, I would go hungry. So I set out to see if I could borrow another one from the home of the 'four Grinders,' my nearest neighbours. 'Henry's Place,' as it was called, was about a mile down the road. The log cabin was set in a patch of cleared ground beside the creek and opposite to it, across the road, were chicken-houses, corrals and barns. There was a large garden surrounding the house and when I arrived Annie, Henry's wife, was standing among the corn and gathering the rich pods for the evening meal, while Viva and Floyd husked them. Annie was the young-looking mother of eight children, and the sister of Alfie Higginbottom.

Annie sent one of the children into the house to find a can-opener that I could borrow, and, Ralph took me across the road to see the animals. The family were getting fresh milk at the moment from a cow that had just had a calf; she was lying in the straw while the hens gathered round her, picking insects from her hide and pecking the milk from her dripping teats. Before milking, Annie set the bull calf to suckle for a few minutes—in order, she said, "to clean the teats." The cow's udder was black with sand-flies.

Behind the corral there was a mound a few feet tall, with a heavy wooden door leading into it. This was the 'root cellar,' and Annie took me inside to show me her preserves. The cellar was formed from an excavation in the mountainside, the roof supported by logs and covered deeply with earth, as a sort of insulation against the cold

in winter and the heat in summer. There were compartments full of potatoes and other vegetables, and apples and pears, and the shelves were loaded with jars of preserved peaches and plums, and with jars of salted salmon. I contrasted these with the English housewife's empty shelves, and told the children how lucky they were.

Annie lent me a can-opener, and I went home to prepare my supper. I had not been home more than a few minutes when Floyd and Ralph appeared with a little tricycle, towing a wooden box in which Patsy, the collie dog, was riding. Ralph said:

"Mom's sent you some salmon. I'll bet you never had salmon like this before! Mom and I caught him last night in the river." They handed me a parcel containing a big cut of lovely red salmon—just like the pictures on the tins. The two little boys sat there and ate an orange while Ralph directed the cooking.

"Mom's going to take you fishing some day!" he said.

When they left, Patsy stepped delicately into the box and was driven home.

The next evening when I was tiling my lamps an old open car crammed with people came bumping down to my door. They introduced themselves as Johnny Grinder's kids—the brothers and sisters of Minnie and Arthur. They had brought me a new can-opener from Jesmond. This was the night of the week when everybody in the valley who had the means of transportation went up to Jesmond to collect the mail, exchange the week's gossip and buy their groceries. The 'Stage Truck' left Clinton on Wednesday afternoon and brought our mail and freight as far as Jesmond. The driver stayed at the

Mountain House overnight and the next day went on about forty miles to Gang Ranch. Pete Coldwell drove the Jesmond Stage Truck down the valley of Big Bar Creek on Thursday morning with the goods that had come out from Clinton and the local grocery orders. So on Thursdays in school all ears were cocked for the sound of the distant truck's engine. The first one to pick up the sound would yell, "Stage!" and the boy who had been deputed to post my letters would leap out of his desk and hurl himself through the open door to go racing up the trail to the road. The truck stopped and the cowboy driver got out and climbed into the back to hand down the bag of mail and the box of groceries. During the next hour the truck went on down to Big Bar Ranch at the bottom of the valley, and on its way back again it would pick up any more mail I might have for despatch. That meant that I had a feverish time glancing through letters—from the Education Office, for instance—that might need an immediate answer, and writing replies, while at the same time keeping the school work going. Sometimes the rancher who was a school trustee would bring my mail down with his on the Wednesday evening, and I could read it and enjoy it at leisure.

This first Thursday, however, the Stage Truck left the road and came right down to my door, as it had on board some furniture sent down by Mr. Mattick to add to the amenities of my cabin. With a green armchair and a chest of drawers of plain, unvarnished wood I felt I had something to build a home around. There were also cans of white and cream enamel paint so I should have material to keep me occupied during the week-ends.

On Friday night the week was over, and I went across from school with armfuls of work to do. By the time I had washed up my supper dishes it was getting dusk, so I prepared to light my lamp, a handsome incandescent oil-burner, which Nick and John had shown me how to operate. Once or twice I had been rather alarmed by the way in which the flame burst up when I turned the tap to release the vapour, but on this occasion the whole thing seemed to be enveloped in flame, which leapt right up to the ceiling. I thought it would explode at any moment, and I picked it up in the dishcloth and ran out to deposit it on the mountainside. In time the flame died down, but I dared not light it again, and I was very much annoyed at missing the chance to get on with my work. It was soon quite dark, so that there was nothing else for me to do but to go to bed.

I was awakened some hours later by a thunderous knock on the door. (I had forgotten to lock the door again.) Startled, and dazed with sleep, I called out, "Come in!"

I heard the kitchen door open and someone step inside.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

A man's voice replied, "I fell off my horse. I thought maybe you could help me."

This was the first challenge to my backwoodsmanship, so I said, "Just a moment!" lit my little bedside lamp and putting on a wrap, went into the kitchen. There stood a dark, husky, healthy looking Indian.

"I'm Little Johnny," he said, "one of Johnny Grinder's boys. You met me the other evening in the car."

There had been eight or nine people in the car, and I did not remember him.

"What is wrong?" I asked.

"My horse shied and threw me," he said. "I caught my leg on a snag. The last teacher used to have some bandages. I thought maybe you could help me."

I said rather coldly. "Well, sit down and take off your Boot."

"There's nothing wrong with my ankle," he replied. "It's my leg!"

As he crossed the room to sit down I noticed a heavy smell of whisky, and wondered if I had anything to fear. He rolled up the leg of his jeans and removed a dirty piece of rag to expose an appalling gash on his leg. I gasped.

"You must see a doctor at once," I said. "That wound should be stitched."

"Haven't you got any iodine?" he asked.

"Oh!" I said. "I could not put iodine on to an open wound like that!"

"Why not?" he asked.

"It would hurt too much."

"I guess it would hurt you more than it would hurt me," he said. "Go ahead! Throw on the whole bottle. I can take it."

But I had no iodine. I took a roll of bandage and knelt at his feet, wrapping the bandage over and over as well as I could. When I had finished I stood up and went over to open the door: his spirited horse was hitched to my gate-post.

"I'm sorry I cannot do any more for you," I said. "Good night!"

Johnny staggered to the door, lingered a moment and then went out. I bolted the door after him and then went

back to bed. As I fell asleep I heard the thud of his horse's hoofs as he galloped round and round the house.

The next morning in school I asked the children, "Did you know Johnny Grinder had had an accident?" and they replied:

"Who? Little Johnny? Sure! His horse threw him into a fence a couple of nights ago!"

"A couple of nights ago?" I said. "Are you sure?" and they said, "Yes: Joe is taking him in to the hospital in Ashcroft to-morrow." I heard later that the doctor had to put eleven stitches in the wound.

But Little Johnny was not my only late-night caller during those early days. It seemed as though people found it difficult to accept the fact that I was prepared to live in that valley, and live alone, solely for the purpose of "teaching school."

One night, very late, when I was just about to retire, I was suddenly startled by the glare of headlights flashing on to my windows. I had not heard a car come down to the door; it must have made the bumpy trip from the roads with its lights out and the engine shut off. I opened my door and saw a gleaming new car with a man at the wheel—a stranger.

"Is it too late for a social call?" he asked, and I answered, "Oh, no!" I was pleased to have some society. Besides, I remembered Nick's injunction that I must at least offer a cup of coffee to any visitors before they embarked on the long journey back to town. I did not know where the man had come from, but he must be received with hospitality so I said cheerfully

"Come in!"

My new friend walked inside, doffing his stetson, and planted a brown-paper parcel on the table.

"There you are!" he said. "Never been opened!"

"What is it?" I asked.

"It's a bottle of whisky," he replied.

"Whisky!" I said. "What for?"

He looked at me for a moment, then, passing his tongue round his mouth as though savouring the liquor, he said drily:

"Some folks drink the stuff!"

"Well, I don't," I said, not with the intention of offering a rebuke, but because I was astonished that he had come with such an odd gift. The parcel stood unopened on the table between us while he sat there and talked for an hour or more, and I thoroughly enjoyed the conversation. When he left he took the bottle with him.

Even the children seemed to be puzzled by the fact that I lived alone. "You ought to have a man living with you to chop your wood and carry your water," they said, and they discussed openly the eligibility of various members of their families, some of whom would be hanging round the door when afternoon school was out. At last I told them that I appreciated their interest in my welfare, but that, although I should be delighted to have help with my wood-chopping, I could not impose on other women's husbands, and in any case there was not room in my little house for more than one person. Their reaction was prompt and resourceful, as always. For the next few days they were occupied with building operations on a structure between my house and the school. When they had roofed it, they pulled nails out of old planks and hammered

pieces of wood together to make stools and a table. I said encouragingly as I passed one day:

"I like your play-house very much."

"That's not a play-house!" they exclaimed.

"Well, what is it?" I asked.

"It's a house for Mannie to sleep in when he comes to stay with you!" they replied.

They frequently questioned me about my visitors. I assumed at first that they were checking up on their big brothers, but then it occurred to me that maybe they were checking up on me. One Monday morning Michael leaned nonchalantly against my doorpost and said, "So you had two men to see you yesterday!"

"Did I?" I asked. (He was quite right.)

"Sure!" said Michael.

"How do you know?" I said.

He opened his hand and showed me two cigarette stubs which he had picked up on my doorstep. He knew I did not smoke.

"Well," said I, "can't one man smoke two cigarettes?"

"They're different brands!" said Michael.

As the seasons passed I discovered for myself that a woman in this valley *did* need a man. It was not a question of the superiority of one sex over the other, but rather of the interdependence imposed by the primitive setting. Here the sexes were truly complementary. If a man quarrelled with his wife and she left him, he had to have another woman from somewhere to take charge of his home while he did the heavy outdoor work. There was no extra bedroom for her to sleep in. If a man deserted his wife, she had to go and be 'cook' to another man in



order to get the means to exist. There was thus in some cases a loose arrangement of relationships. I could not bring myself to condemn the way of living as immoral: these people had a different heritage from mine and their rules of conduct might derive from a tradition where such relationships were acceptable. On the other hand, I believed in the rightness of the moral standards to which I subscribed sincerely enough to wish to hand them on to my pupils. The Christian principles which I hoped to transmit to them must be inherent in my own way of living. Any laxness on my part would discredit my faith in their eyes; these children had so few outside contacts that it was inevitable that a newcomer would be an object of comment. Children in civilization have an opportunity to assimilate their values from many sources in the many daily contacts they make, but these children had perhaps not met a comparable situation before. The only 'un-attached female' among their people was Kitty Ann, an aged Indian woman who rode down the valley from time to time on a white horse. She had no man to fend for her, and she still shot her own deer and chopped her own wood.

It was apparent that the children had problems, however. One afternoon I was sitting beside Viva correcting her English exercise. There was a whispered conversation going on beside the window, and Floyd suddenly turned round and asked, "Where do babies come from, Miss Taylor?"

I assumed that this was a question designed to test my response rather than a genuine request for information.

"Who told you to ask me that question, Floyd?" I asked.

"Douglas!" said Floyd; and a ripple of amusement went round the class. Viva said:

"Babies come from God, don't they, Miss Taylor?" and I replied, "Yes!" and left the matter for the moment.

As I went on with the marking I was thinking round the subject. I recalled that someone had told me that Minnie Dunn was about to have a baby. Douglas lived in the same house; perhaps he really was troubled about it. At break Douglas was chopping wood, so as I passed the wood-pile I smiled at him and said, "Well, Douglas! Where do babies come from?"

He looked up at me and answered, "I don't know!"

So I said, "Viva was right when she said that babies come from God, because all life comes from God. A baby grows from a seed: part of the seed is in the father and part is in the mother, and during the first few months of life it grows safe and comfortable in the mother's body. Then it is born." I waited a moment and then asked, "Any more questions?"

"No!" said Douglas, and returned to his wood-chopping. I could only hope that that explanation would suffice for the present.

I could not believe that these children living so close to nature were unaware of the facts of mating and birth. They played riotous games on the mountainside, enacting the activities of the ranch; straddling long slender willow-wands with a tuft of leaves left on at the end, they galloped about, lashing their fringed-string tails in one hand behind them. When I rang the school bell they would come streaming in with merry laughter, saying, for instance:

"We only branded the girls, but we branded and 'cut' [i.e. 'castrated'] the boys!"

I did not like to think that perhaps human parenthood

meant no more to them than the mating of mare and stallion. If enlightenment was needed, it was my job to provide it. But any moral training that I gave would be based on Christian principles. The source of these is the Bible . . . and I was forbidden to 'expound the Scriptures.'

## THE SCHOOL-CHILDREN OF BIG BAR CREEK, 1948

### *The children of Henry and Annie:*

	Grade
Marjorie, 13 years . . . . .	8
Ralph, 10 years . . . . .	4
Viva, 8 years . . . . .	3
Floyd, 6 years . . . . .	1

### *The children of Old Johnny and Melanie:*

Fred, 14 years . . . . .	5
Minnie, 11 years . . . . .	3
Arthur, 9 years . . . . .	2

### *The children of Alfie and Anna:*

Peter, 14 years . . . . .	4
Edgar, 12 years . . . . .	5
Douglas, 9 years . . . . .	2
Dick, 7 years . . . . .	1

### *And, from the same house, the son of Minnie Dunn:*

Michael, 11 years . . . . .	4
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### *Also, attending until Christmas, from the Circle H Ranch:*

Philip, 13 years . . . . .	7
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### *Chapter III*

## HALLOWE'EN AND THANKSGIVING

I WAS now beginning to have some idea of the type of children I had to deal with. Their chief quality was their courage: life was hard for them, but I never heard them grumble. They all had to get up early in the morning—especially the Higginbottoms, who lived so far up the valley. Before setting out for school, they must fetch water from the creek for the day's needs: if it was wash-day, so much the worse. They had wood to chop and animals to feed; their horses to catch and saddle; their lunches to prepare. When they reached school the bigger boys had more chores—chopping wood for the school stove; lighting the fire; filling the water-pitcher. The younger ones would come and sit in my house, and I used to display some new article sometimes, to see if they would notice it. They never failed the test; all of them were very observant and their comments quite uninhibited.

"Gee! That's a little coffee-pot!" they would say. "Where'd you git it?" Or "Mom's got a wooden spoon just like that!" Or "Scrubbed your floor, huh?" Or "What'd you put those weeds on the table for?" Wild flowers were all 'weeds' to them.

There was a majority of males in the valley of about three to one. Alfie's family were all boys, except the three- and four-year-olds, and since one woman could not cope with all the domestic duties for such a household, the boys

had to be adept, not only at washing-up and cooking, but at sewing on buttons and scrubbing floors. After school in the afternoons they had to hurry home to their work on the ranch—seeding, hoeing, digging potatoes. Labour seemed to be provided communally for work on their own ranches: seed could not be planted before the middle of May because of snow and frost, but once the spring had come the rate of growth was rapid and there would be haymaking before the end of June. The season travelled up the valley and the youths followed it, knowing that they would receive at least board and lodging for their help and stabling if necessary for their horses, and that the help would be reciprocated when their own family needed it. In November they would still be haying on top of the mountain. Besides hay, they grew potatoes and root crops, 'corn' and cabbages and onions, and oats. Down by the river, melons, tomatoes and cucumbers would ripen and the orchards were rich with apples and pears and crab-apples, and peach plums and prune plums. During July and August, while the men were busy in the fields, the women and girls were picking fruit and bottling and canning. The wild berries were plentiful: Saskatoon berries, which the children called 'olallie berries'; blueberries, choke-cherries and 'hooshum' berries, and the mountain sides were covered with wild strawberries. During my first week Douglas brought me a bottle of what looked like tomato ketchup and invited me to drink it; he said it was the juice of the 'hooshum' berry and recommended it highly. I tasted it and hid a grimace; it tasted of quinine. I said I would put it away until I was really thirsty, and I set it on a shelf under my table. A

few days later the cork blew out halfway across the kitchen. But a delicious confection could be made from a handful of the berries. You put them into a deep bowl with a tablespoonful of water, pressed them with the back of the spoon to squeeze out all the juice, and then whipped up the mixture with an egg whisk, added sugar and perhaps a little flavouring, and had a very satisfying meal. The froth whipped up higher and higher; I would add a few wild strawberries to make it pink.

When it came to working for the white rancher, the people were not so industrious. The rancher's complaint was that he could not depend on them. Just when he was at his busiest, one of them would come with a story about having to take his mother into the town to the hospital, and the rancher, if he was inexperienced, would advance the man's pay so that he could produce the necessary taxi-fare, with the injunction to him to return himself the next morning. Usually, the Indian would not turn up again for a week or more, having had a spree in town. For the natives, money was a commodity that was hard to come by. When Young Alfie had to come out to the valley for the winter, he left his horse in town; in the spring he went back to the town to work for three months to pay for his horse's keep. The Indians also kept cattle. At the time of the cattle sales these were driven for forty miles to be shipped for beef. At such times, and after the hunters had been in the valley, the people had plenty of money. Then they could lay in a supply of foodstuffs from town. Dick came to school one day and said: "Dad came home in a truck last night with seven hundred dollars' worth of groceries, and all the bills said, 'Thank you!'"

It was a couple of weeks after the beginning of term before Pete put in an appearance. I watched him as he came towards my cabin door, a slim, leisurely lad with an oval, olive-coloured face and almond-shaped eyes. His face was expressionless; I could not decide whether this was due to reserve and secrecy, or whether he was of a passive disposition. I soon found that he had a somewhat puckish sense of humour. I had written on the blackboard, 'Handwriting', preparatory to a lesson to the little ones on the subject. Peter stood up, politely indicating that he wished to say something.

"Is there such a thing as 'frotwriting'?" he asked.

I had been worried that morning because I had had difficulty over the water. Water from the creek for my domestic needs flowed through an 'irrigation ditch' into a wooden, box-shaped pipe, from which it flowed directly into my pail; it was easier and less dangerous for me to put my pail under the spout of water than to lower it into the waters of the creek. Nick had warned me that as winter approached ice would form at the entrance to the ditch and my pipe would cease to flow. Then I should have to go right down to the creek for water. This morning I had found the irrigation ditch dry, and I was puzzled. It was too early in the year for ice. Pete was my oldest pupil, so I appealed to him.

"Will you have a look at my irrigation ditch?" I said to him, "and see if you can find out why the water has dried up."

"Sure!" said Pete, and he went off down the trail. In a few minutes he was back again.

"Want me to fix it?" he said.

"Can you fix it?" I asked.

"Sure! Got a shovel?"

He took the spade and the axe with him and I did not see him again that morning. 'Well, I asked for it,' I thought 'I suppose he's lying on his back somewhere in the sun.'

When afternoon school was over and the children had gone home, I took my pails down the trail and found to my great satisfaction that the water in the irrigation ditch was flowing abundantly. Putting my pails down, I went to see how the problem had been solved. I followed the course of the ditch right back to the creek, struggling through the undergrowth as well as I could. Apparently the water had been escaping down side-channels. Pete had cut down a tree to block one channel, and built a wall of mud across another, so raising the level of water in my ditch to a point at which the flow could be resumed. It seemed to me that this use of his knowledge was more significant as a guide to his intelligence than were the results of artificial standardised tests which had no reference to his background.

I never knew where Pete was living. He had spent the summer months working with his mother, Anna, picking fruit in the Okanagan Valley. Anna was separated from Alfie, and Pete did not stay in Alfie's household, as his brothers did. He was 'mobile,' since he had a horse which was exclusively his—a fleet, little beast referred to by Pete as his 'strawberry roan'. Fred, my other teenage boy, also had his own horse: I knew that these boys loved their horses, but Fred made a very revealing remark on one occasion. I was talking about values in life and I said, "What might a man love more than he loved God?"



expecting someone to reply, 'Money' or 'Power.'

Fred said promptly, "His horse!"

Fred was late in starting the term because he had been out with the hunters. The hunting season opened on September 1st, and Johnny and his family of boys were in great demand as guides. Though Fred was only fourteen years old, he knew how to track game. His first composition read:

'In my summer holidays I went hunting across the river. The first three days we never saw anything and on the fourth day we got a moose. On the fifth day we got a deer and a moose. It snowed one inch. Then tracking was easy and we saw eight does.'

His mother, Melanie, who was pure Indian, was determined that Fred should have book-learning, too, and so he came reluctantly to school. I felt that he had much to offer in recounting his own native knowledge, and took pains to give him the means of expression.

To me one horse was much the same as another, but to the children they were as different as people. They could identify them by name when they were just mere specks on the mountainside. Somebody looking out of the window in school would say, "There's Joe going up Big Bar Mountain!" and if I asked, "How do you know it's Joe?" the answer would be, "I can tell him by his horse."

When they rode to school they would generally leave the horse free to graze, since if they put him in the barn they would need hay for him. When they came out of school to go home, they would scan the slopes for their

mount, and often have to cross the creek and take a long walk up the mountain to catch him.

I found this new environment a stimulating professional challenge. What ought to be my aim in setting out to teach these children? There was no question of preparing them for a competitive scholarship examination or of equipping them for occupation in industry. In this remote valley the educational system could be a purely cultural one, devised to enable life to be lived at its best. My basic aim would be to make the children articulate, to train them to think and enable them to communicate their thoughts. But fluency of thought is only achieved in conditions of freedom; the rigid demands of a *Programme of Studies* might prove an obstacle. The children were already too much accustomed to work under direction, distrusting their own initiative. They demanded to know, 'How many spellings to learn,' 'How many pages to read,' 'How many sums to work,' instead of going on as far as they could.

The two Grade 2 children, repeating the work a second time, were really retarded. Arthur, aged nine, was a replica of his brother Fred. Very shy in class, he spoke seldom, and if I asked him a question replied jerkily, as briefly as possible. He was in a complete muddle about arithmetic, though he could read. Douglas was a most endearing little boy, chiefly on account of the charming smile which lit up his features from time to time. He was very practical, very independent, and full of ideas. He was also 'naughty,' in that he rebelled against authority. I was surprised to find that he could not write one word.

though he could read haltingly. I decided that what was needed with Douglas was a focal point of interest, and this I found by accident. For the last period of the afternoon I would often read to the children while they drew pictures of their life and interests in their 'scribblers.' I was debating what I should read to follow *Uncle Tom's Cabin* when someone lent me a copy of the tall tales about Paul Bunyan, the 'giant logger. These seemed to me to be just the right sort of folk-tales for Canadian children, and I tried them on my pupils. The stories were much appreciated, especially by Pete, Michael and Douglas. One day Douglas surprised me by announcing that he was going to write a composition—and he set about it forthwith. He was a little boy who tackled his difficulties with determination. He followed me round asking every other minute, "How do you spell . . . ?" and then making his own suggestion as to how to spell the word, which was generally right. His composition turned out to be a reproduction of one of the Paul Bunyan stories—the one in which Paul's wife comes to the logging camp to visit him and drops her false teeth in the lake, and Paul rescues them for her by lowering a roast chicken into the water, so that the teeth bite on it and are brought up to the surface.

Arthur was always fiddling with a pencil, but if I strolled down the room past his desk he would cover up his work with his arms and blush to his ears. One day I gently removed his arms and saw that he was drawing a scene with horses with such sensitivity and skill that I sought for a bigger surface for him to work on. There were no large sheets of paper in the school, but in my house the wall between the kitchen and the bedroom was

covered with cream paper. One afternoon I invited Arthur to paint a picture on this wall, to show me what life in the valley was like at his home. I left him there with a tiny paint-box containing four colours and two thin little brushes. When I went into my house after school, the result took my breath away.

Dick was seven years old. On the very first day of school I looked across from the windows of my house at lunch-time and was horrified to see Dick at the wood-pile with the axe. I dared not shout to him for fear of precipitating the accident that I feared would happen. So I stepped outside and called to Edgar, his elder brother.

"Can you get the axe from Dick?" I asked in a half-whisper.

Edgar looked at me. "Sure!" he said. "Do you want it?"

"Oh, I don't want it," I said, "but I thought he might hurt himself!"

Edgar laughed. "Well, he has to chop the kindling at home," he said.

So Dick, and even Floyd, continued to use the little hand axe; they were very sensible in its use. They liked to chop piles of kindling from which they would make model corrals and ranch buildings. Dick was a Higginbottom, and thus practical minded—slower in response than Floyd, because he considered a matter from all angles before making a comment. Floyd's drawings revealed the vitality and spontaneity of his mind, and he was liable to come out with any sort of remark; the strange thing was that he found great difficulty in learning to read. He could write a little composition while he was still struggling with the pre-primers in reading.

Both these children in Grade 1 took easily to arithmetic. I ordered some cards for teaching number combinations which were like dominoes, and the two little boys worked many sums with these. One day Dick came out and asked if they could have the box of cardboard money. I gave it to him, and went on with the lesson I was giving to some of the others. After a time, pleased with the application with which the Grade 1 pupils were working, I commended their industry to the rest of the class. Just then Floyd called out in a piping little voice:

"Miss Taylor! I won two dollars!"

"*Won?*" I said, puzzled while the class burst out laughing.

"They're gambling!" said Edgar.

Michael was harder to understand than the other boys were. He was one of the sons of Minnie Dunn, who was acting as housekeeper to Alfie Higginbottom. He and his mother came from the Pacific coast, and were of a different tribe from the others, and it was obvious that Michael felt his isolation. He was not so ready to share as were the others. He worked in a different way, finding it necessary to leave his seat frequently and stroll round to Ralph or Pete, who were in the same grade. I watched this restlessness, wondering if he went to find out the answers to his sums, but the children were all much too independent to cheat; they even resented it if I helped them with their work. All they needed was that I should explain the method to them and then leave them to work it out. I found finally that the best stimulant to Michael was to achieve an 'A'; after that he would work like a house on fire. He was mischievous, too, like Pete, but his mischief

tended to have a little malice in it sometimes. He was very sensitive, cloaking it by an appearance of being 'hard-boiled': when I had occasion to chastise him, I would give him the added punishment of fetching me a pail of water from the creek, so that his tears could be spent down ~~there~~ and not before the others. He was very slow in everything he did, and at first he produced ~~nothing~~ artistic. This was perhaps partly because he was always too much absorbed in the story I was reading while they sketched. The others would be busily scribbling away while Michael sat wide-eyed waiting for the dénouement of the story.

One afternoon while I was reading there seemed to be something going on at Pete's desk; the other children gradually left their own seats and congregated there. As they were quiet and appeared busy, I made no comment, but at the end of the period I said, "What have you all been doing?" and they brought forward a corporate model which they had been making out of Plasticene and bits of twigs and corrugated paper from the chalk-box and so on. It represented a log house with corral, horses and cattle; duck-pond and ducks; squirrels and dogs and cats. The 'ducks' were the corpses of blue-bottle flies they had found on the window-sill; one dog carried a duck in its mouth. I was so delighted with the spontaneity and vitality of this model that I promptly ordered clay (in powder form) and thenceforth they spent their odd minutes modelling clay horses, the best of which I kept in my cabin on a special shelf which went all round my walls. The procession of clay figures (unfortunately, not fired) thus streaming round my walls gave me much pleasure.

Ralph was a year younger than Michael, but in the same Grade with Michael and Pete. He was weak in reading, like his little brother, Floyd; this was partly because he found it necessary to mouth the spelling of a new word before he could pronounce it. He considered that since 'Dad,' who had only had three years of schooling in his life, was now able to 'beat the teacher,' it was highly unnecessary for *him* to waste the best years of his life at school, but under an assumption of indifference he was anxious to do well. His failures at times were due to the nervous excitability of his temperament, but he had to a marked degree that spontaneity of expression which I was so keen to preserve in these children. His little clay horses seemed to be alive—tossing their manes in the wind, or lying contentedly in the sunshine, or galloping down the mountain. Once, in my ignorance, I ventured to criticise one of his horses: I thought it looked a little short in the back. The artist in him was outraged. "No!" he exclaimed indignantly. "That's a young stallion, and he's showing off to his old woman!"

Viva and Minnie were in Grade 3. Viva was only eight years old; she was intelligent and capable, and had a mind of her own. Given the right training and environment, she would have made an excellent teacher; in view of the scarcity of women in the valley, she was more likely to become a mother. She would ride round to see me after school, she rode bareback and was always ready to offer me a ride. The first time she did this, I thought to myself, "If an eight-year-old can ride without a saddle, so can I." So I accepted her offer. I found the mare's back very round and very slippery, but I kept my

seat successfully as she ambled across the sage. As soon as she came to the road she broke into a canter, and I sprawled in the dust. The horse stopped at once and looked round at me as much as to say, 'What on earth are you doing down there?' After this I was aware of my own limitations and did not venture to ride without a saddle.

Minnie was a lovely girl, pretty to look at, with dark eyes, tanned cheeks and long, silky black hair. She was old for her grade because she had had to miss attendances through ill-health, having been at one time under observation for tuberculosis. She was not so quick at her school work as either Vivie or Marjorie, but she was artistic, like her little brother, Arthur. Minnie was the only one of my pupils at Big Bar Creek with whom I could feel that my affection was reciprocated. The others seemed to set out to emphasise that there was a gulf between us—whether because I was English or because I was white or merely because I was the schoolteacher, I did not know. I always hoped that a relationship of confidence would be established between us, but the boys especially maintained an attitude of indifference.

I regarded Marjorie as the 'Head Girl,' but this was of no significance to her. Loyalty to the school, which is such a feature of the English educational tradition, was a concept outside the experience of these children. Nobody coveted the job of Monitor: when I asked for volunteers to clean the blackboard daily, the first point to be settled was: How much pay was offered for doing it? This took me by surprise, but I was much more shocked later when, finding that the school regulations required that the flag (at that time the Union Jack) should be hoisted



every day school was in session, I asked who would like to undertake the task. "How much do we get for it?" they asked, and I said angrily that if they were not proud to be given the honour of hoisting their country's flag I would do it myself.

But whenever visitors were coming to the school I could always depend on Marjorie to work thoroughly and unobtrusively to make the school look as nice as possible. The boys carried the water from the creek, but Marjorie bore the main brunt of the scrubbing; and scrubbing and mopping that school floor was no light job, especially in winter. Marjorie never left her work in the middle to go out and have fun. It was the same on the night of the party: she was a most courteous hostess, handing round sandwiches and cakes and coffee, and seemingly taking no thought for herself. What I found disappointing was that she would not accept responsibility in school, and she was apt to come out with remarks to the effect that her father was going to take her away from Big Bar Creek and send her to a 'proper' school in the town.

Edgar was more white in appearance than the other Higginbottoms, and had the family characteristic of a sense of humour. His interests, however, were more 'white-collar' than any of the other children's. It was his ambition to work in the store at Jesmond. As he was in Grade 5 at the age of twelve, he was of average ability, and there was no reason why he should not achieve his aim.

As the days became shorter and the outdoor work had to cease early in the evening, I began to have visitors—lads who welcomed a way to kill time and a chance to

look me over. My most regular visitors were Cecil and Young Alfie (not Alfie Higginbottom), and they would experiment with my typewriter and drink coffee while I marked books. If I had time to talk, I would tell them about England, or ask them to tell me stories of their hunting adventures. I showed them my photograph album, in which I had pasted pictures of people in the valley; some of these I had labelled 'Cowboys' and some 'Indians.'

In school about this time I became aware of an undercurrent of antagonism: remarks would be made with regard to 'crazy Englishmen', and little Dick surprised me by saying that if he went to England he would "shoot every Englishman he saw." At last I said, "What is the matter, children?"

There was a hostile silence. Then Viva said, "You called us 'Indians'!" I remembered the photograph album. I did not know how I had transgressed.

"Well, you are Indians!" I said.

"We're white!" they all replied.

"But you are part Indian," I said.

"We're *white*!" they repeated.

"If I were part Indian," I said with some heat, "I should be proud of it!"

"We are; but we're white," they insisted.

I then told them that English children thought Indian children were wonderful, and that my former pupils in England were thrilled to hear about them and their skill with horses and as hunters. I told them that no children I had ever taught had had the gifts that they had: their clay horses for instance, were creations of beauty; their independence and resourcefulness filled me with admiration;

they had a knowledge of woodcraft and natural history which it would take a city boy a lifetime to acquire—and in time we became friends again.

I had had evidence of their resourcefulness in the way they dealt with, and solved, problems which entirely balked my 'superior' intelligence. The first time I wanted to refill the fount of my gasoline lamp, I found to my annoyance that the only funnel I possessed was too thick in the stem to go into the opening. Ralph was passing and he said conversationally, "Filling your lamp?"

"I can't fill it," I said. "The funnel is too big."

Ralph tried the funnel and then said, "Got a pitcher?"

I fetched the only jug I had. This was also too big in the spout, and he discarded it. He looked round, saw an empty tin can which I had put outside for disposal, fetched the axe from the wood-pile, hammered the lip of the can into a narrow spout with the back of the axe—and filled my lamp with ease.

I had had to ask the School Board for one or two desks, as there were none big enough for my older boys. These came out on the Stage Truck, and suffered in their switchback journey, one of them getting broken. The cast-iron leg was in two pieces. This was a nuisance, as it would take so long to get another.

"Want me to fix it?" asked Pete, and I replied, "Now, Pete! You can't mend cast iron!"

"Sure we can," said Pete; and he and Fred proceeded to make a splint out of thick wood and bind it to the broken part of the leg with some thick fence-wire, which they hammered right into the wood. Fred held the blade of the axe flat underneath while Pete hammered against it.

In spite of their insistence that they were white, the children of Big Bar Creek had at least one quality which was an obvious inheritance from their Indian forebears: that was the capacity to disappear. Out of doors, of course, they could merge into the landscape in the blink of an eye, yet even indoors they could efface themselves in a way that mystified me. One day I was sitting in front of the class with Floyd standing by my left side while I helped him with his reading. Ralph came out from his desk with a question about the problem he was working, and when I turned back to Floyd he had disappeared. I looked towards Floyd's desk; he was not there. I looked behind me; he was not there. "Did Floyd go out?" I asked, and Michael answered, "Maybe."

I waited a while and got on with something else. Then I sent Douglas to the toilet to tell Floyd to hurry up. He came back and said, "He's not there!"

"Well, where is he?" I asked.

"Under your desk?" suggested Arthur.

I looked there in vain. The class was quietly enjoying the joke.

"Now, where is he?" I demanded at last, and Floyd came out from behind the waste-paper basket.

One afternoon, when all the windows were open wide, there came a knock at the door and I went to answer it. I stepped outside for a moment to speak to the messenger, and when I went indoors the room was empty. I assumed that the children had gone out through the windows, and I took the bell and rang it vigorously. Then they all emerged from behind cupboards and under desks. On another occasion four of the boys failed to come back into

school after the morning break. When assured that they were not down by the creek, I searched the room for them. In one dark corner there was a home-made table with a shelf underneath it: I barely glanced at this, knowing that if anyone was hidden there his feet would show. At last I ordered the boys to come out from their hiding-place, and the four of them tumbled out from under the table, where they had been folded together like jack-knives.

But when Pete disappeared before my very eyes I began to feel that the joke was being carried too far. The children were busy on various activities out of doors, and Pete had undertaken to make a mail-box for me, so that if the School Trustee, or any one with a message for the school, was passing by on the road they could leave a note in the box instead of coming all the way down to the school. With his usual resourcefulness, he had ensured the completion of the box when I had taken it for granted that it could not be finished. He wanted hinges for the lid, but I had no hinges. Had I a piece of leather, perhaps? No; I had no leather. So he went across to a deserted shack, rummaged in the rubbish till he found a worn-out moccasin, cut strips out of the moose-hide of which it was made, and used them for hinges. After he had returned, I was standing outside the school door while he was working at a carpenter's bench just inside. He put his head out of the open door and said, "I've finished the mail-box, Miss Taylor!"

I said, "Right, Pete. I'll come and look at it," and I went into the school. The finished box was on the bench and I exclaimed with pleasure—but there was no sign of Pete. I looked behind the few pieces of furniture, but he

was nowhere to be seen. He could not have gone out through the windows without being seen by me. I looked round again: I began to have a funny feeling down my spine. Then I looked up. Pete was balancing on the narrow edge of the open door, crouching like an Indian ancestor who might have been hiding from a Paleface. The upturned corners of his mouth and the slant of his almond eyes indicated his delight in the success of his trick.

I was happy to find that with such a small group one could run the school as a mother runs her family—allowing freedom of movement and of conversation during recreative lessons, and requiring silence only when the child or his neighbour was working on something demanding concentration. My fundamental aim was to enable the children to express their ideas fluently, and I began by encouraging the drawing of pictures. At first they wanted to be directed, and would ask how much to 'measure,' and what to draw. I introduced pattern so that they could enjoy using colour, and they would ask, "What colour should I do the middle bit?" or "How many times shall I repeat this row?" and I would answer, "Well, what colour do you think goes well with the border?" or "Are you going to put anything between the rows?"—encouraging them to use their own judgment.

I was still rather worried about the *Programme of Studies*. I wanted to be loyal to the educational system under which I was serving, but I was not sure that in following the recommendations of the *Guide to the Curriculum* I should be opening the door to a fuller life for these particular children. At last I wrote to the Department of

Education in Victoria, stating my views and asking if I was proceeding on the right lines. I was much relieved to receive the following letter from the Assistant Superintendent of Education.

“DEAR MISS TAYLOR,—I have read your letter with interest and admiration for your insight into the part which environment plays in equipping a child to score highly on the ordinary scholastic test. You are very right in ignoring the results of the ordinary intelligence test and in providing materials of instruction which take into consideration the backgrounds of your pupils and their needs.”

After this I could carry on with my own ideas and principles with a clear conscience. During the lovely autumn afternoons the children would suggest work that could be done out of doors, and if their suggestions were sensible and constructive I would give them freedom to implement them. They were full of ideas: some would fill old pails with sand from a shallow patch of the creek, and carry it up to make an outdoor sand-table for Floyd and Dick. Some were making a garden: the tumbleweed was getting out of hand and needed attention, and there was much else to be done. Douglas brought up violet roots from the banks of the creek and planted them on the north side of my cabin; they built an elaborate ‘snow-shed’ over them. Some of the boys gathered up the old tin cans which littered the site and flattened them ready for burial.

We were still troubled in school by the pack-rats. The

boys insisted that we must set traps in order to get rid of them. They played havoc with school materials: anything left uncovered was in danger. Chalks would be carried off, erasers, pencils, even scissors, and in their place we would find little heaps of dead matches or bits of old orange-peel or stale bread from under the floor-boards. If I put a bowl of rose-hips and autumn leaves on my desk it would be despoiled overnight—stripped right down to the level of the water and the debris scattered all over the place.

The first time we set a trap it disappeared. Michael found it a few days later down in the bush: it contained a rat's leg. Next time we nailed the trap to the floor. Again we caught nothing but a rat's leg. At this I forbade the children to set the trap again, but Edgar said he knew a method by which we could catch the whole rat. He spread newspaper inside the trap, because, he said, rats like to walk on newspaper, and he laid a piece of stove-pipe leading towards the trap because rats like running through tunnels. The next morning the thrice-caught rat was sitting in the trap alive, held by a hind leg. The boys opened the trap and the rat made a hideous bid for freedom, darting out and trying to run on its two hind legs. The front legs were merely stumps. After that we had a different routine. The boys set the trap before leaving school in the afternoon. Then, a few minutes after dark I went across to the school with my torch, carrying also a lump of wood. The rat, newly caught, would be struggling in the trap, and it was my job to hit it until it was dead. It took me some time afterwards to calm my revolting stomach, and I left the carcase to be disposed of by the boys in the morning.



## *Chapter IV*

### HUNTING SEASON

THE week-ends were periods of silence and refreshment. In spite of the isolation, I found the life satisfying. In the daytime I would 'lift up mine eyes unto the hills,' where big white clouds in a blue sky bumped along the rim of the mountain ranges, and at night I watched the shadow of the mountains on the slope opposite retreat before the rising moon, and listened to the distant barking of the coyotes floating across the valley.

I spent singing hours beautifying my cabin. All the rough woodwork in the kitchen—shelves, cupboards, bench, chairs, table—I painted with white enamel paint. I had ordered green-sprigged white muslin from Clinton, and the little girls measured my windows and cut out and made up dainty curtains. The pans and lids gleamed on the pan-shelf, and on the white table the bowl of snow-berries, rose-hips, choke-cherries and autumn leaves made a pool of delight. Every time I opened the door to come into my house I felt welcomed. But not, alas! by human companionship. I sometimes yearned to have my friends drop in, but they were far, far away. The ranchers' wives in the valley made no social advances; I had not even a dog or a cat for company. So I developed the habit of talking to myself. I planned the decoration of my bedroom: this in deep cream paint—to match the plain wood of the chest of drawers—and dark, stained floor.

In my imagination, I polished the floor till it shone like a mirror: little did I think that in the spring it would be graced by the tawny skin of a cougar.

October 31st is Hallowe'en, and traditionally the children's festival in Canada. We must have a party, of course. But when I discussed it with the children they told me that any party at the 'Schoolhouse' would be attended by the whole population of the valley and its environs. So I let them write invitations to all their friends as an exercise in correct letter-writing, and on the day before the party we carried out all the desks on to the hill side and scrubbed and mopped the school. I had ordered a quantity of fireworks from Ashcroft, and two cases of 'pop' for sale, and these were delivered by the Stage the week before the event. Two of the older boys were to act as barmen, and excitement was intense. There was much preoccupation with the making of masks, and lanterns were contrived from pumpkins and empty syrup tins.

As the day approached I became rather nervous: I did not know how to entertain adults in this sort of a community, and I wondered if I should have to cope with drunkenness or hooliganism. I had sent an invitation, as a matter of courtesy, to the School Board Secretary at Ashcroft, but that was only a gesture: no one would want to make that journey just for an evening party. However, when I was eating my usual solitary supper around six o'clock, I heard a sudden fanfare on claxon horns and my cabin was lit up with the glare from the headlamps of two cars as they swept down from the road on to the trail. They drew up at my door in the darkness, and out

tumbled an incredible number of people: Mr. and Mrs. Mattick and their small daughter; John and their two children; the Principal of the Ashcroft school with his wife and two little boys, and three young girl teachers. They had been driving since three o'clock and had had no meal. Now they surged into my kitchen carrying boxes and baskets and cardboard dishes, and in a few seconds they were all hard at work uttering rolls, opening tins of beans, frying sausages and eggs and tomatoes, making coffee. Nick and John were both six-footers, and their ten-gallon hats brushed the ceiling. All available seating accommodation was put into use, supplemented by logs from the wood-pile—and anyone who could not find a seat sat on the floor or on somebody's knee, or just stood up.

The schoolchildren were now arriving, and into the patch of light cast by the windows would flit strange apparitions, shrouded in garments made out of old sacks, and carrying their ghoulish lanterns. The little visitors, who had been warned to watch out for the Hallowgoons and ghosties, skipped about with shrieks of delicious terror, taking refuge in the cabin when the excitement was too intense.

At last the party began. The lads who had long left school joined with gusto in the unsophisticated singing games which to me spell a children's party; spurred and hatted, in their gayest neckerchiefs, they pranced up and down to play 'The Grand Old Duke of York' and, 'Oranges and Lemons' and 'Nuts in May.' The barmen did a roaring trade with the pop, and when they had sold out—as it was now quite dark—we all went out on to the

mountainside to watch the fireworks. "Oohs!" and "Aahs!" reverberated as the rockets whizzed skywards or the cascades of golden sparks fell from the spinning wheels, and every child had two or three sparklers to twirl round for himself.

The next event was supper. Mrs. Mattick had brought an enormous iced cake as light as mistletoe, and the ranchers' wives had sent chocolate iced cakes and apples and candies, and the children's mothers had brought chicken sandwiches and more iced cakes and cookies. They made coffee in a pail on the stove in my house and brought it over to the school. When the party was in full swing, our town visitors had to say goodbye, but no one else seemed to have any intention of moving, so I racked my brains for some other form of entertainment. Had I but known it, all they wanted was to dance—to twirl madly in square dances all night long. This discovery came later. As it was, I hit on the idea of shadow play. We draped a sheet over the archway at the back of the room and put the lamps behind it: then the children performed actions in mime close to the sheet and the audience guessed who they were and what they were doing. This caused great amusement, and the people were reluctant to go home, even after midnight.

There was a thin silver edge of moon to light the riders home, and I stood at my door listening to the receding drum of hoof-beats on the earth road, grateful for the success of our first party.

Towards the end of October I had received an invitation to attend the "Teachers' Convention" to be held at the

end of the following week in the city of Kamloops. This was an occasion not to be missed, as it would provide an opportunity for me to meet my colleagues in the teaching profession and to become acquainted with the representatives of the Department of Education in the area. But there were difficulties to be overcome. Teachers wishing to attend the convention were authorised to close school on the Thursday afternoon, but I should need to close on the Wednesday, so that I could travel to Clinton on the Stage Truck on Thursday afternoon. The fare from Jesmond was \$2, whereas to arrange for a taxi to fetch me would cost \$15. I should in any case have to have a taxi down the valley on my return on the Sunday.

I found that Kamloops was about 120 miles away. It was a beautiful city, all green and gold with the fall colourings, and during my brief stay there I was much impressed by the demeanour of the High School pupils and the fine buildings of the school, in which the Convention was held. During my first week at Big Bar Creek I had asked the children to write a composition on, 'What I hope to do when I Grow Up,' and I had been appalled by the poverty of their ideas. Marjorie's aim was to be a cook to a man who had no one to look after him. Edgar's ambition was to serve in the store at Jesmond. Ralph had written:

'When I grow up I shall get married and have lots of kids to feed my chickens and herd my cattle.'

But if they had never seen a high school, of course they had no ambition to attend one! How I wished they were

with me at Kamloops! On the second day of my visit I went shopping—a forgotten delight—and bought some folkweave material in cream and brown and green to make a bedspread, and curtains to drape my hanging wardrobe and my bedroom doorway, so that I had plenty to occupy me on my return, especially as I had no machine and must do all the sewing by hand.

Early in November I was notified that the School Medical Officer would be visiting us on Tuesday for routine medical examinations of the schoolchildren, and to give inoculations and vaccinations to pre-school-age children. He was also going to perform any necessary dental treatment. The children were quite excited at the thought of having their teeth pulled: not one of them was afraid. Snow had fallen the previous day, but on the day of the medical examination it had turned to slush, with mist in the atmosphere—just like an English winter day. This made driving difficult and it was after 2 p.m. before the doctor's car arrived. I had my house snug, with kettles full of hot water on the stove, and the children went over to the doctor in turn. In school the coming and going was likely to disorganise the time-table, so I read a story to the remains of the class. When school was over, the doctor was still busy: my kitchen was humming with activity. The nurse, dressed in sweaters and ski-pants, was administering injections; half-dressed children were spitting blood into bowls; eyes and ears were being tested and chests sounded; the table was littered with cotton-wool and dressings, and the doctor was completing medical records by the light of my paraffin lamp. I carried on with my chores of wood-chopping and water-carrying

until the last victim went in. Minnie was the last to be examined. She had to ride three miles down the valley against snow flurries after four extractions, but when I wrapped my woollen scarf around her face she only smiled. Since the only food my visitors had had since breakfast had been a few sandwiches and a flask of coffee, I now brought out the venison stew which I had made the previous evening, and it was voted delicious.

Now that the hunting season was in full swing, I had no problem about getting fresh meat. It was against the law to sell deer-flesh, and so I received gifts from 'he fathers and big brothers of the children—a whole shoulder of venison, for instance, or a choice dish of deer liver. When a string of horses and riders, with the pack-horses roped together, went past the school I gazed at them with as much admiration as did the children. Someone would say proudly, "There go Dad's hurters!" as the procession went on down to the Fraser River, to cross by the ferry and track game on the far side of the canyon.

On Monday Edgar came to school with a message from Alfie: "How would you like to ride up to Jesmond with Edgar to fetch your mail on Wednesday evening?"

"On horseback?" I asked, thrilled. "I should love it!" Alfie was going to be busy with the hunters, and he wanted his mail to answer that evening, before the Stage Truck came. He did not wish Edgar to make the long ride to Jesmond by himself, though I could not imagine what protection I should be if we met any wild animal. As soon as school was over on Wednesday afternoon, I filled my lamps and my pails while the boys chopped wood for me; then I put on my thick clothing—wool socks; ski-

pants and tunic and fur-trimmed hood—and we set off. Pete had a rattling old bicycle on which he whizzed down to school now over the ruts and stones; there were three horses between the rest of us. Douglas and Dick rode together on Nigger, Douglas sitting bareback behind the saddle and holding a rope which was tied to Pete's handle-bars, so that they could tow him up the slope. I mounted Edgar's horse, sitting on the Western saddle, while Edgar sat behind. Michael had the buckskin to himself, and he set the pace. I wondered how Douglas kept his seat on the satin-slippery back of the galloping horse and at the same time manipulated the towing rope which was hauling the bicycle. When we reached Alfie's house, Buck, Michael's horse, was allotted to me: sacks for the groceries were put into the saddle-bags and Edgar and I, each on our own mount, set off for the steep climb to Jesmond. I was surprised to find how easy the horse was to ride: one had only to lean in the saddle and the horse would respond, changing direction as indicated, and at the slightest tap of one's heels he would begin to lope. I had never galloped before, and I found it exhilarating. Buck seemed to enjoy it, too.

We soon came to snow, and Edgar casually interpreted the tracks in the dusk, saying who was ahead of us how long it was since they had passed that way. I kept looking back to the scene below us, where the last of the sunlight was edging with silver the tree-fringed range of mountains. In front of us, behind the black mass of the forest, one snow-capped peak stood out against a cold, blue sky.

There was a cheerful welcome for us at the Mountain



House, and I sat in the big kitchen enjoying the conversation and reading my letters. After a supper of deer's meat and blueberry pie, we set off on the homeward journey. For the first few miles the air was literally sparkling, as the starlight scintillated on the minute particles of frost floating in the air. The dazzling specks were so brilliant that, at first, I thought they were distant signal lights. Further down the mountain the darkness was thick, but the horses knew the trail and pounded along. By the time we got back to Edgar's home I was aching in every muscle, so I declined the offer of a horse to take me down to school, being only too thankful to walk the three remaining miles.

A few miles beyond Clinton, in a beautiful clearing in the forests, is the Circle H Ranch, a picturesque cluster of log cabins which cater for hunters in the autumn. Philip Vecqueray came from the Circle H to stay at Big Bar Ranch for a time, so that he could attend school. But as the winter approached travelling became too difficult and he had to return home. His parents were English, and they invited me to spend Thanksgiving week-end in November at their home. Mr. Vecqueray drove by car to fetch us after school on Friday afternoon—a distance of about twenty miles each way. The ranch buildings consisted of a semicircle of little log cabins, each containing a double-tiered bunk, or a bed, with wood-burning fireplace and easy chairs and accommodation for clothes. The main building was a large log-cabin with a kitchen, dining-room and lounge. The dining-room was at right angles to the lounge, like the top of a letter T, and

the long dining table fitted into this, with the archway to the lounge behind. Bear rugs were spread on the polished spruce floors, and other skins draped the furniture.

By supper-time the next day all the cabins were occupied, and there were twenty-nine of us to sit down to the meal. As Mrs. Vecqueray had not expected such a crowd and had no other woman to help her, she was glad to enlist my services. The hunting parties went off on horseback on Sunday morning in search of game, while Philip and I helped with the chores around the cabins. I was longing to walk in the forests, but there was so much to do that we were occupied until about four o'clock in the afternoon. I had been warned not to go walking by myself, and so I asked Philip if he would be my guide. We armed ourselves with little B.B. guns and set off. The moss under the trees was deep and soft, and the scent of resin from the spruce trees filled the air. Philip led the way toward the swamp, and as we came near it he motioned me to tread softly. He climbed a little hillock behind a tree, stood looking for a moment and then whispered urgently, "Come here!"

I thought he had seen a squirrel, and I stepped up softly behind him and looked in the direction in which he was pointing. There, about 100 yards away, his head raised uneasily towards us, stood a bull moose, disturbed as he was drinking. We saw the black 'wattle' and the full spread of his horns. We moved in our excitement and he turned and lumbered off into the shadow of the pines.

We started to run for home, to spread the news. Near the ranch we came upon returning hunters, tired and dejected from a day of fruitless tracking. The next after-

noon, about half-past three, a couple of the hunters asked me if I would show them the way to the swamp. I said I would try, since there seemed to be no one else about. My companions wore red hats, in accordance with the game laws. This is to avoid shooting accidents in the woods. I followed the same trail as the one we had taken the previous day. We came to the hillock and I crept up to it, but when I raised my head over the top I saw no moose—merely a circle of red hats round the swamp.

Most of the hunters went home with their next few months' meat supply assured, the carcass of their victim strapped to the back of the car. The next time Philip came down to the school I heard him telling Pete and Fred about the week-end.

"What sort of a hunter is she?" asked Pete in undertones.

"She's good!" said Philip, and I felt really proud.

By the middle of November I was already thinking about the Christmas festivities, and I wondered if we could undertake a Nativity play. Although the *Manual of School Law* forbade the teaching of Scripture, the tradition of opening the day with a period of Scripture teaching, which I had acquired during my years in England, was so much a part of me that I found it very difficult to forgo the habit in this new environment. We recited the Lord's Prayer every morning, as permitted, and I read a passage from the Bible as prescribed, but in view of the wide age-range, the passages set were sometimes unsuitable. In the September days, when the sun shone so gloriously and the cottonwood trees along the banks of the

creek were pillars of pure gold, I could not forbear to teach the children the hymn, 'All Things Bright and Beautiful.' There was no musical instrument in school, and I had to teach the hymn by voice. Ralph found this so disagreeable that he would surreptitiously put his fingers in his ears. But they picked up the tune quite creditably and seemed to enjoy singing the hymn. They were naturally musical, as they were naturally artistic.

One day, after we had said the Lord's Prayer, I ventured a question.

"What do we mean by 'Heaven'?" I asked.

There was a pause. Then Michael said:

"Heaven's the place you go to if you're good."

This seemed an adequate answer, but then Ralph came in with:

"And if you're bad, a man comes along with a pitchfork and sticks it into your belly and throws you into the middle of a big fire!"

This Victorian concept took me by surprise, I said, "Oh, no, Ralph! I don't think that can be true!"

"Sure it's true!" said Ralph. "The Sisters told us."

"Well, the next time you see the Sisters," I said, "tell them I don't think that is true."

"Not me!" said Ralph. "Besides," he added, "it's the only way I can stop our Roy from swearing." (Roy was four years old.)

"But wouldn't you rather have Roy stop swearing because he wanted to be good than because he was afraid of what might happen to him if he was bad?" I asked.

Ralph pondered, then gave a hesitant "Yes!"

The next time I was down at Henry's place I asked

Annie about the Sisters, and she told me that they came down the valley about once in ten years, when the Bishop held a Confirmation. The priest was supposed to come once a year to hear confessions. I wondered if this was all the chance the children had of instruction in Christianity. Later on, in school one day I asked them if anyone else had ever taught them about Jesus. They said:

"Some people came once—a man and two women."

"What were these people?" I asked.

Michael said doubtfully, "I think they were Christians."

"Well, aren't we all Christians?" I asked in astonishment.

The children replied with one voice, "No! *We're Catholics!*"

The Indian families in the valley were in the charge of the Roman Catholics. I was a member of the Church of England, but I felt urgently that it devolved upon me to bring up the children to conform with Christian standards. If the Catholic priest had sought my cooperation, I would gladly have given it him. But he did not do so, and when I wrote to him on behalf of the children, he ignored my letter. He probably was much occupied with his large parish.

After a time it occurred to me that I could present the great stories of the Old and New Testament as literature, and I began to tell these. Never had I been among children who could better appreciate them. Their parents were anxious about them, as Mary and Joseph had been when they lost Jesus, owing to the danger from wild beasts. They knew only too well what happened to the seed which fell upon stony ground. They had seen the devotion of the

shepherds who brought thousands of sheep over 100 miles to pasture down their valley. For me, too, the Old and New Testament stories came alive in this environment as they had never done before.

By mid-December the temperature outside was eighteen degrees below zero. At night when I went out of doors I found the scene like one of those Christmas cards that children love. In the light of the moon the sky seemed blue-grey, dotted with a few little stars: the snow was thickly powdered with diamonds, and from the black bulk of the log house two golden squares of light shone out. I enjoyed the cold. The only bad moment of the day was when I first woke—to see the windows thickly encrusted with my frozen breath. I would skip out of bed into the kitchen, where in not more than three minutes the logs would be roaring in the stove. (I had found out why so many newspapers had been packed in the car.) Then I returned to my blankets until the room had thawed out.

By 9.30, when school was due to begin, the house would be very cosy, and the first children to arrive would come straight in to get warm. They all had to walk to school in the winter, as the horses had been turned loose on top of the range to forage for themselves. I was sorry for the little boys when they came in after their long walk looking pinched and cold, their eyelashes white with hoarfrost and little icicles hanging from their noses and chins. I discovered with a shock that anything containing moisture was now out of action: the beautiful, new, two-gallon flagon of ink froze solid overnight, shattering the

glass container and leaving a bottle-shaped lump of ink on the shelf. Paints or pottery clay that had been mixed with water just turned to rocks.

For the first half-hour of the day we sat in outdoor clothing, huddled round the heater. This consisted of a sort of drum lying on its side, supported on legs, with a door at the front end. The fire was started with small strips of kindling and then fed with long sections of logs of pine or spruce, and in a very short time it was giving out a great heat. If the outside temperature dropped more than ten below zero the children were not required to attend school. If none of them turned up, this meant another day of silence for me. I had few books to read, and no radio or newspapers; when Prince Charles was born, a messenger rode down from Jesmond to give me the news. The children were full of it at school the next day. Fred said, "They're going to give Princess Elizabeth an extra bottle of rum. It said so on the radio!" (Some of the homes had battery radios which received the programmes sent out from Kamloops.) There was always so much to do, however, that I had not time to be lonely: one can be much more devastatingly alone in a flat with all modern amenities in the centre of a teeming city. I experimented with cooking. The rancher had invited me to help myself to the fruit in a little orchard near the school, and I had made clear, amber-coloured crab-apple jelly, and apple chutney. I made sponge cakes and cookies, date-and-nut bread and cinnamon buns. I had on occasion had to swallow some unpalatable masses, but I could at least return thanks that there was only myself to suffer them.

The irrigation ditch was out of action now, of course.

and I had to trek right down to the creek for water, taking the axe with me to break the ice. The waters were silent at last, locked in the grip of the ice: twigs reaching down from overhanging boughs looked as if they were embedded in crystal. You could not go out without a head-covering and thick gloves; it was painful to touch the handle of the pail, or even the wooden handle of the axe with the naked hands.

A few days before the end of the term the boys went out with axes and returned with three trees—two to stand in pails on the doorstep, and one for the presents inside the room. For there *were* to be presents. Mysterious and exciting parcels had been arriving in the mail, addressed to the children of Big Bar Creek. They were from the ladies of the Columbia Chapter of the Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire in Vancouver, with whom I had established a correspondence on behalf of my pupils.

Every afternoon we rehearsed our play. Edgar was the reader, reading directly from the Bible a number of passages giving continuity to the Nativity story, while the actors performed their parts in simple mime and we connected the incidents by singing carols: they learnt about ten carols. I thought dress would present a difficulty, but the children saw no incongruity in the pieces we managed to collect. 'Herod' wore my green overall, and Douglas, as one of the Kings, was delighted with my blue satin kimono. Michael, another King, insisted on wearing his mother's fur coat, which came down to his heels. 'Mary' wore an old blue satin petticoat and swathes of white cheesecloth (intended for school dusters). 'Joseph' was robed in a pink dressing-gown, with a turban, and



leaned on a staff. The dressing of the shepherds was simple once I had been able to borrow sheets and blankets. Viva was the angel, supported by a heavenly host in the shape of Dick and Floyd: Annie had contrived their costumes with sheets and cheesecloth.

When the night of the performance came the room was packed. Joe had made repeated journeys with his truck up and down the mountain road until fifty people or more had gathered in the little schoolhouse. The youngest was Lila's baby, aged ten months, and the oldest was Auntie Maggie, eighty-three years old, and almost blind. After an hour or so of games, one end of the room was transformed into a stable. The floor was strewn with straw, then a grey curtain was hung across the wide archway to form a backcloth, and the manger group formed a tableau in front of it—Mary sitting at the head of the Crib, and Joseph standing behind, leaning on his staff. The performance was simple, but the audience found it moving. To me the important thing was that the children were now not only familiar with the Christmas story, but were able to read it for themselves from the Bible.

After the play, shepherds' crooks and kings' crowns were laid aside, and the seats pushed back to the wall ready for the distribution of presents. Soon the floor was littered with wrapping-papers and the air loud with exclamations of delight as the toy trucks and strings of beads and pretty handkerchiefs were revealed. Suddenly there was a shriek from Floyd, who declared he had seen a scarlet-clad figure passing the window, and the next moment the door opened to admit Santa Claus with a loaded sack. Somebody called out, "Where did you leave your

reindeer, Santa?" and he replied, "Oh, I stabled them up at the O.K. Ranch for a rest." Then Floyd declared with wide eyes that it must be the real Santa, because Harry Marriott, who owned the O.K., had told him Santa was going to stable his reindeer there.

Santa Claus brought more gifts: a hunting knife for Edgar; a fountain-pen for Marjorie; books and fish-hooks and mechanical toys. Then Marjorie took a present off the tree for Santa Claus himself. It turned out to be a mouth-organ, and he was delighted with it. However, he had to hurry on to his next party, and so we all wished him a happy Christmas and the merriment continued. The next morning I was under cross-examination. Douglas declared Santa Claus was wearing Walter's boots, and Floyd said his beard was pinned on! At last I had to admit that Walter, Little Johnny's brother, had deputised for Santa Claus, who had been held up by bad weather. The real fact was that none of the ranchers would bother to come so far to make Christmas real for the children.

## *Chapter V*

### HITTING A HIGH SPOT

I WAS quite excited at the thought of going 'home' for the holidays. In response to a postcard which I had sent in the mail the previous week, the taxi-driver from Clinton came to collect me at the school at about half-past four in the afternoon, and I retraced that first journey through the forests, going downhill this time, the headlights of the car showing up the deer tracks in the snow. When we turned the last corner and the bright lights of Clinton appeared below us, I had an unexpected shock of pleasure: civilisation must mean more to me than I had thought. The little village felt like a metropolis after the dark loneliness of my mountains.

At Clinton I visited the home of the school Principal, where I was hospitably received by his wife. After supper I enjoyed the exchange of professional gossip: we discussed the children, and the Principal said, "I suppose they are all in the low I.Q. bracket. Many of these children are unt teachable." I told him that he was right in his first assumption, but that the children were all teachable and, in my opinion, possessed a lively intelligence with regard to rural matters.

Around midnight I boarded the trans-continental bus, bound for Vancouver, and I was so drowsy that it seemed only minutes before we were humming down the mountain towards Ashcroft. The bus zoomed along, straight for the

edge of the precipice, with nothing beyond but the starlit sky; then swung round a hairpin bend, just giving the passenger time to visualise the fate that awaited him if the bus ripped through the fence and catapulted down to the Thompson River. Then suddenly came the vision of fairyland—the geometrical pattern of the streetlights of Ashcroft far below—and I was wide awake. But no one whom I knew joined the bus and I slept again until daylight.

Vancouver was gay with the season's festivities. Last-minute shoppers, loaded with parcels wrapped in decorated papers and tied with gay cellophane ribbons, surged through the brilliantly-lit stores. All day long loud-speakers over the store doorways amplified the carol tunes and Christmas peals from electric carillons. The big coastal steamers brought in hundreds of passengers from Alaska and northern British Columbia, all eager to enjoy the bright lights. In the streets evergreen wreaths hung from overhead wires and huge illuminated Christmas trees decorated the public squares, and the tiers of street lights quivered in reflection in the water below. The heavy scent of cedar boughs hung in the air, and across the inlet the black silhouette of forested mountain ranges cut a zigzag out of the skyline.

My holiday was saddened by the discovery that my aunt was suffering from cancer and had not long to live. I visited her frequently in hospital and also spent one or two evenings at the cinema and the Children's Theatre. There is no pantomime tradition there, but the performances in the Children's Theatre were charming entertainment. I also made a point of getting in touch with

the ladies of the Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire who had sent presents for the children. I told them how much these had been appreciated, and gave them some idea of the sort of life the children lived in the valley. They said they had tried to help a number of rural schools, but that the teachers whom they had approached had failed to reply to their letters.

My own immediate friends listened open-mouthed to the stories of my adventures, but I could not understand why they all found it necessary to commiserate with me. To me the past three months had brought fulfilment of the passionate desire for adventure which I had so long suppressed. In my childhood the first school I had attended had been decorated with large-lettered texts and proverbs expressing worthy sentiments, such as, 'PROCRASTINATE IS THE THIEF OF TIME'; 'ONE GOOD DEED DESERVES ANOTHER'; 'WHAT WE SEE BECOMES PART OF US.' The proverb which appealed to me most, however, was 'A ROLLING STONE GATHERS NO MOSS,' and when I asked my father what it meant he interpreted it for me as meaning that a successful man does not keep on changing his job. So I had grown up ashamed of the urge within me to seek wider horizons and had striven to conform with the laudable ideal of becoming a moss-gathering stone. At ten years of age my adventurous spirit had made me the most rip-roarin' 'cowgirl' of the neighbourhood: at twenty I managed to live the life of a pioneer at least one week in each year when I took my Wolf Cubs to camp, but by the time I was thirty I was bogged down in an industrial city, a prim and lonely schoolmarm, seven years out of college.

Teaching is an adventure in itself, of course. Every

September the teacher receives her new class, a new set of personalities to explore, a new group of minds to measure, and when I first came out of College this professional challenge had been adventure enough. But as the years passed and life repeated itself in a succession of arduous weekdays and solitary Sundays, I began to feel cheated of the things that mattered. I had missed the adventure of marriage, and as time went on I became more poignantly aware that the children whom I loved were always other people's children. In the city I was homesick for the simple delights of my country upbringing. Hemmed in by regiments of chimneys and miles of tram tracks I chafed for the open fields and hedgerows: dazzled by the city lights and deafened by the clang of the traffic, I dreamt of starlit skies over the silent Wold.

But chiefly I dreamed of Canada. I longed to teach in a prairie school with cowboys galloping round the door; I selected names like 'Moose Jaw' and 'Medicine Hat' and built up fantasies around them. I did not have the slightest anticipation that my dreams would one day be realised: When I was a young teacher I was never solvent, and my father would not have allowed me, adult though I was, to leave England unless I had a job assured. But one fateful day when I was visiting a friend, I met a teacher who had spent a year in Canada under an exchange scheme which I had never heard of, and she urged me to follow her example.

This was opportunity knocking, and I hastened to open the door. I found that the only appointment still vacant that year was for a teacher to go to Prince Rupert in British Columbia, so I borrowed on my life insurance

policy enough money to buy me a one-way ticket to Vancouver, and then broke the news to my family that I was going to Canada. After the storm had subsided, my father handsomely augmented my travelling fund, and I soon found myself embarking on a cargo liner for Montreal.

At first Canada disappointed me: there was so much of it. I looked in vain for cowboys galloping beside the track and, as we approached the Rockies, for wild animals emerging from the forests. When we came to Banff, I left the train to stay overnight, but as I had no contacts there I set out to explore by myself. There was beautiful Indian handicraft in the shops; there were also some attractive camp-fire blankets, but I was disappointed to find them labelled 'Made in England.' Leaving the town, I followed a trail through the woods. I paused to admire a group of log buildings set back among the pine trees about 100 yards away. As I was gazing a glossy black bear ambled out from the shadows under the trees, overturned the dustbin with a flick of his paw and shouldered his way into it. My blood raced: this was the sort of thing I had come to Canada to see. I decided that he must be a tame bear: nobody would be so stupid as to keep a wild bear in his backyard! I longed to stroke him. Walking across the space between us, my footfall deadened by the carpet of pine-needles, I stopped a few feet away from him. I pursed my lips and made the sort of noise you make to a dog. The bear leapt out of his bin backwards and sat up on his haunches, glaring at me, with cabbage leaves dangling from the corners of his mouth. He looked like a glossy black teddy-bear. I held out my hand and was going

to take a step towards him, but I hesitated: some sixth sense indicated to me that he was about to strike. At the same moment a sudden scream from the gate startled me into panic and I ran blindly for the road. When I looked back I saw that the bear had returned to his supper.

The angry passers-by greeted me with "Are you *crazy*?" and I learnt that I had been trying to make friends with a fierce she-bear from the mountains: they pointed upwards and I saw three furry balls clinging to the top of a tall pine tree and watching Mamma as she foraged in the garbage.

My year 'on exchange' was over all too soon. I returned to England in the autumn of 1938 and the next year war broke out. With a desperate longing to help win the war, I joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service in September, 1939, and served continuously for six years, joining up as a private and achieving the rank of subaltern after a time. I took the precaution, before my release, of undergoing a medical examination to receive an 'Emigrant's Medical Card,' in case I should ever be able to return to Canada. But this possibility seemed very remote now. My parents were old and needed me, and I could not be happy if I felt I had let them down.

I returned to my first love, the teaching profession, and prepared to gather moss. I found that educational methods had changed during my six years away from the profession, and I needed a 'refresher course.' I spent a wonderful year at the London University Institute of Education. Then suddenly the plans I had made for a humdrum life collapsed like



a pack of cards. My mother had died and my father insisted on living alone, and I could return to Canada. After weathering the manifold frustrations of those days—the difficulty of obtaining a passage, a passport, a Bank of England authority—fortified by faith and a purse containing \$40, I set out on my journey to Vancouver to the home of my mother's brother, her sole surviving relative. When I arrived I found that my aunt had been in hospital for years, but her friend, in whose home my uncle lived, made me very welcome and gave me the freedom of her house until I should find a job.

If the number of the advertisements for 'Teachers Wanted' was any indication, I should have little difficulty in finding a teaching post. The daily papers were full of them. But first I must find out whether or not my qualifications were acceptable. My hostess said indignantly, '*Of course* your qualifications will be accepted' (she was English herself), but I knew that the professions in British Columbia very rightly protected their own members by demanding certain conditions of outsiders who entered the province and wished to practise their profession. Perhaps I should be required to attend a Canadian university before being allowed to teach in Canada.

I wrote to the British Columbia Department of Education in Victoria, on Vancouver Island, and was invited to attend for interview. Before leaving England I had asked the Ministry of Education to send a note of my professional qualifications direct to Victoria, and I was glad to find when I went for interview that I had been awarded a First-class Certificate to teach in B. C. for a period of up to two years, after which I must attend a course of study in

Canadian methods of teaching at Summer School of the University of British Columbia.

It now remained for me to choose my job and apply for it. I sat on the shady veranda of my new home with newspapers strewn around me. "Uncle!" I would call out from time to time "Where is Lilloet?" or "Salmon Arm", or "Alert Bay?" And Uncle would come to the door and give it as his opinion that it was 'in some neck-of-the-woods,' and ask why I could not take a job in Vancouver like a civilised human being.

"I've come here to get away from civilisation!" I would say. "I want to listen to the wolves howling to the Northern Lights for a change." Suddenly a name leapt out at me: 'Teacher wanted' the advertisement ran, 'in the rural school of BIG BAR CREEK. Twelve pupils. Salary according to scale.' Big Bar Creek! . . . I had a fascinating mental picture.

"Uncle! Does Bar, mean Bear? They want a teacher at Big Bar Creek. Where is it?"

Uncle appeared in the doorway, filling his pipe.

"Well, if it does," he said, answering my first question, "I wouldn't go within miles of the place! I guess it's somewhere up in the Kootenays."

We got out a map of B.C. and finally located Big Bar Creek in the Cariboo, west of Clinton, running down to the Fraser River. I wrote a letter of application and posted it that evening, stating my qualifications in detail and appending copies of testimonials, as one always does in England. I had yet to learn that testimonials are seldom called for in Canada; in the teaching profession appointments are made on the strength of the Inspector's report,

which is issued at the end of the year, after he has made his inspection. A typed copy of it is mailed to the teacher.

Two days later, we were having breakfast when the phone rang. Lucy, my hostess, answered it. After a moment she looked at me and said, "Long distance! For you!"

"For me!" I exclaimed. Who in Canada could be calling me? I took the receiver and said, "Hello?"

"This is the Secretary-Treasurer of the Ashcroft School Board," said a man's voice. "With regard to your application for the school at Big Bar Creek. Can you get here by the end of the week?"

"Well, yes . . ." I stammered. "But . . . er . . . don't you . . . I mean . . ."

"I think you will like the children," the voice went on. "They're a sturdy, frontier type."

"Yes, of course," I said. "But don't you want to interview me?"

"Oh, that's all right," the speaker replied. "We think you are what we want. We prefer an older teacher because the post is somewhat isolated. We'll expect you here on Friday, then. Goodbye!"

I hung up the receiver, and when I had recovered my breath I said, "I've got it!"

"Got what?" said Uncle.

"The school at Big Bar Creek."

"You're crazy!" he commented.

I visited the hospital to tell my aunt the news: she looked at me wisely and said, "We shan't be seeing much of you, then!" On the following Thursday night I boarded the long-distance bus going eastwards—and that

was how it had all begun. Now I would not have changed my secluded valley for all the neon lights in Canada—but I don't think anyone believed me when I said so.

I left Vancouver to return to my valley on the last day of December, travelling this time by train as far as Ashcroft, where I was to stay overnight, going on to Clinton by bus the next day. I had booked a room in the hotel there, which was lucky, as the place seemed to be surprisingly full of people. About six o'clock in the evening I rang up the doctor with a query about one of my pupils. During the conversation he apologised that he could not ask me over to his home to spend the evening, as he was taking his wife out to dinner. He hesitated a moment, and then asked a strange question.

"Have you got a formal with you?" he said.

"A formal . . . ?" I asked.

"Yes. Long skirts!" he said.

"Well, how did you guess?" I said. "It so happens that I have!" (I had brought back with me some of the things I had previously left behind at my uncle's house.)

"Hold on a minute!" said the doctor. "I'll ring you back." I hung up the receiver, wondering what this mysterious conversation presaged. After a few minutes the phone bell rang. I picked up the receiver.

"Get on your glad rags!" said the doctor. "I'll be round to pick you up at seven o'clock. Don't eat any dinner. You're going to a party!"

"A party!" I said, bewildered.

"Sure thing!" he replied. "It's New Year's Eve, you know!"

I rushed back to my room, feverishly threw everything out of my case, and persuaded the hotel management to allow me to use the laundry-room to press my frock. I was duly buttoned up and powdering my nose when there came a knock at my door.

"Come in!" I called, and the doctor walked in.

"Wow!" he said, raising his eyebrows.

"Will I do?" I asked.

"And how!" he said, walking round me to get the full effect. It *was* rather a nice evening dress of periwinkle blue lace, cut low in the bodice, over a full-skirted blue satin foundation. But if anyone had told me I should take it out of moth-balls to disport in this cowboy town—this 'neck-of-the-woods,' as my uncle would have called it—I should have been quite incredulous. Unexpected treats are always the greatest fun, and I swished past the revellers in the hotel entrance-hall with an anticipatory glow in my heart.

It turned out to be the most amazing and vivacious party I had ever attended. The guests, all correctly attired, met in an Ashcroft home—a large, bungalow-type house with pleasant rooms opening on to a central corridor. We chatted in the dimly-lit, comfortable drawing-room, for a time while drinks circulated, and then, at the suggestion of our hostess, grouped informally in fours round low tables. Then we filed out of one door, across the corridor into the dining-room, out by another door and back into the drawing-room—on the way collecting serviettes, plates and cutlery, and then our choice of the most delectable dishes laid out on the table: cold turkey, chicken, beef, ham, with all the etceteras,

cranberry jelly, bread sauce, stuffing, olives, salads and mayonnaise. Back in the drawing-room we disposed of the feast picnic fashion round our coffee tables. Then we made a second procession to deposit the 'empties' and collect ice-cream desserts, fruit and coffee. Our host and hostess literally kept open house: there were so many comings and goings that I began to feel dizzy. Some of the younger ones drifted off in couples to the dance in town, and the rest of us set to work on the washing-up. This was a corporate effort, shared by men and women, some people operating as washers or driers, and the others forming a chain along which the dishes were passed to their places in the various cupboards.

The house began to fill up again: I wondered if it was because the dance was not a success. I knew I could not hope to remember the names of the people whom I had met, or even whether I had 'met' them or not. A big man bore down on me and took me by the wrist. "Come with me!" he said, and he drew me through the throng into the corridor, past the dining-room, where late-comers were cleaning up the buffet dishes, and into the kitchen. The crowd in here was even thicker. The young couples were back again, sharing stools - by the simple expedient of sitting on each other's knees - or propping up the wall. Suddenly, above the noise of the party was heard the triumphant pealing of bells from the radio. The New Year was coming in! Everyone went mad. The men kissed the women and the women kissed each other. The men progressed round the room kissing every hopeful-looking woman they met. The whisky glasses were raised aloft and the New Year was uproariously welcomed.

Then we all bundled into cars and went over to the dance, which was a seething mob of Indians and cowboys and nondescripts like us. We gyrated as rhythmically as possible under the circumstances, until the crush became too great. Then the doctor and his wife and my escort and I returned to the deserted bungalow, where we sat and chatted and ate sandwiches and drank coffee until the small hours. We did some more washing-up. My new friend kept insisting that he was not scared of school-teachers, and to prove it he gave me one or two admonitory slaps. Then our host and hostess returned and the doctor took me back to the hotel to spend what was left of the night in bed.

The next morning, before I caught the bus to Clinton, I had a visitor—a sober and somewhat sheepish-looking visitor. He said his wife had sent him to apologise in that you weren't supposed to slap the schoolteacher—at any rate, not on the posterior! He was assured that it had been a pleasure.

## Chapter VI

### MAKING THE TEACHER 'GIT MAD'

IN the first week of January a warm Chinook wind arrived strangely before time: the children could play out of doors without jackets and in a couple of days the snow had disappeared. But then we woke up the next morning to find the snow was a foot deep, and the weather became very cold—so cold that my dish-mop, which hung from a nail on the logs inside the house, was frozen solid every time I came to use it, and even the pails standing near the stove were always covered with a layer of ice. This was because eddies of cold air filtered through the chinks between the logs. Yet the room itself was beautifully warm: there was no question of sitting huddled over the fire as one does in an English house in winter. One Saturday afternoon I carried a pail of hot water over to the school intending to clean all the blackboards, but the moment my cloth touched the cold surface there was a film of ice on the board, and I could neither get it off nor write on top of it.

One day Pete came to school accompanied by a 'hound-dawg.' This was an English pointer which had been left behind by the hunters because it was gun-shy. He was such a wretched bag of bones that it broke my heart to look at him. Indians seem to expect a dog to do its ~~work~~ foraging, and Freckles was not used to that. He had probably been brought up in kennels where everything



was done for him. When Pete asked me if I would like to buy the dog I assumed that he could not afford to keep him, so I said I would not *buy* him; he could remain Pete's dog, but I would gladly give him a home until the spring. So I had a companion at last—a long-eared, bloodshot-eyed, sentimental junk of dog that went gallivanting ahead of me when I took my pails down to the creek in the mornings, and chased the squirrels up the trees near and far. He was soon eating me out of house and home, but I appreciated having something to talk to. He obviously had some internal complaint, drinking pints of water at a time.

This term I had a new pupil: Marjorie's elder sister, Dolly, who had left school the previous June and been working in Clinton, was now back in the valley and the children said she was 'crazy to come back to school.' So I invited her to come and see me. She was a pretty girl, with a broad brow and black curls hanging below her cowgirl hat. She had completed the Grade 8 studies, and Grade 9—which ranks as 'junior high school'—is not allowed in rural schools without special permission from the Inspector. She was intelligent, like the rest of the family, and I decided that I could give her a course in typing which would stand her in good stead. So while awaiting the Inspector's recommendations I set her to work with my *Manual of Typing*, and allowing her to use my own precious typewriter, working by herself in my house. She came every afternoon for two or three weeks and was doing very well. Then one day she failed to turn up. I asked Marjorie where she was.

"She's quit!" said Marjorie. There was no apology implied.

"Why?" I asked.

"Dad's sent her up the mountain."

Presumably she was going to be someone's 'cook.' I was rather taken aback by this incident and at the first opportunity I discussed it with the School Trustee.

"They're like that!" he said. "You can't change them!"

That was the consensus of opinion among the white people in the valley.

"They're a bad bunch of kids! You can't change them!"

Anyone who had had experience of juvenile delinquency in industrial areas would recognise that these children were a very fine group of country children whose deficiencies were due to lack of opportunity—particularly the opportunity of contact with the right example. If they were to change, they must first have a model. I knew it was up to me to provide this model.

The children had a poor opinion of my educational methods: they considered I was not a 'proper' teacher and did not hesitate to say so. This was probably because I did not require them to sit in rows and work to a rigid timetable and put up a hand when they wanted to make a remark. The most important thing, I felt, was to give them confidence in the use of English. Reading was important, and discrimination with regard to what they read would be developed in proportion to the practice they had in writing. But they would never learn to write freely through lessons on 'The Construction of a Sentence' or 'The Nature of a Paragraph'—the value of that sort of teaching would come later—still less through exercises involving underlining adjectives or deciding whether a

statement was true or false. They would only be able to write if they knew they had something to say that other people would be interested to hear, and that was the approach I emphasised. I told them they had more to write about than anyone I had ever met: that life in their valley, though it might seem dull to them, was full of incidents that would spell glamour to a city boy. I invited them to record each day anything of interest that had happened at home or on the way to school: from these accounts; which they made in their 'scribblers,' I selected items which they re-wrote neatly and illustrated with their own drawings, to form a nature diary. This was hard labour at first, especially to Douglas and Arthur, who could not write the words they wanted to use, so that I had to make a copy for them. Even Marjorie, at the top of the school in September, 1948, could produce no more than a few lines:

'We found a garter snake over by the teacher's house. We put him in a pan full of water. He could swim. When we would touch him on the head he would put out his forked tongue.'

The following year her first composition read as follows:

'This year Dad got a contract from Mr. Marriott to put up 'he wild meadow hay<sup>U</sup> on halves' [i.e. taking half the crop as payment for his<sup>U</sup> labour]. "The hay had not been put up fo 'three or f<sup>U</sup>ur year<sup>s</sup>, so it was hard to cut, because there was a lot of old hay lying about flat on the<sup>U</sup> groun d that<sup>n</sup> would get caught in the cogs.

'First of all you need to cut the hay with a mowing machine, then let it lie flat until it dries. It took about four days to cut at the first camp. The next thing to be done is to rake the hay in windrows, then bunch it. Almost any other hayers would then shock the hay, but Dad said we would not have time. You shock the hay with a pitchfork: it makes it easier to haul.

'When they had enough hay raked we started hauling. To haul hay you use a team and sloop—the more sloops the better. If there is also a team for the derrick it saves unhooking the team of the sloop on to the cable. It takes one man to drive the derrick and one to trip the load after it gets on top of the stack. The stacker has to stay on top of the stack and straighten off the top after every load. Swamp hay is the hardest to stack: you have to move every straw.

'When you get the stack high enough you have to top it off, then put some poles to hold it down. If you put the hay up too wet it will burn, and what does not will go black and no animal will eat it. So putting up hay is not so easy as you might think.'

It seemed to me that nature study was more important as a subject on the curriculum than science for these children—nature study not from books so much as from the environment, supplemented by reference to books. They could not name more than two or three of the wild flowers that grew on the mountains, brown-eyed susans, violets and bluebells. These last were little blue campanulas that in spring spread over the slopes in waves of purple. All the rest they dismissed as 'weeds'. I sent to Vancouver

for illustrated flower-books from which they could identify and label their specimens, and we kept a nature table stocked with our finds. We caught a water-beetle, the biggest I had ever seen, and kept it in a bowl on the table. Then one lunch-time the children came running with a bucket containing a still more monstrous beetle, three inches long, with corresponding girth. It made a meal of the smaller one overnight.

I had received my first direct challenge before this time in the matter of discipline. I would not tolerate the chewing of gum in school, since I knew that this led to the objectionable habit of 'parking' gum on the underside of the furniture. One morning I saw Douglas with his jaws moving, so I said:

"Douglas! Are you chewing gum?"

Douglas smiled and said, "Yes."

"Get rid of it!" I said firmly.

Douglas took the gum out of his mouth, went over to the stove, kicked open the door (the knob was too hot to touch with the hand) and—I supposed—threw the wad of gum into the fire. He returned to his place. A few minutes later I saw that his jaws were working again.

"Douglas!" I said sternly. "What did you do with that gum?"

"I put it back into my mouth," said Douglas.

This called for drastic action. "Go over to my house!" I said. The strap provided by the School Board in confirmation with the requirements of the *Manual of School Law* had 'disappeared' before my arrival. My predecessor had used it. It could guess what had happened to it.

I walked slowly across to my house debating as to what

action I should take. Douglas was waiting on the doorstep. I opened the door. "Come inside!" I said. "Now, I gave you an order and you did not obey me. You *have* to obey the teacher, so I am going to punish you." Just then my glance fell on my dish mop, hanging on the kitchen wall. My problem was solved.

"Hold out your hand!" I said. He did so, and I took him firmly by the wrist and administered three sharp cuts with the handle of the dish mop. I gave him a moment to compose his features and then sent him back to school. So my dish mop remained the instrument of correction throughout my stay in the valley and the children developed a healthy respect for it. One evening when two of the older boys were chatting in my house one of them leaned back and drawled:

"Say, Teacher! Hear you use the dish mop when the kids give trouble!"

"Yes; I do," I replied.

"Wal, I guess that don't hurt much," they said.

"Would you like to try it?" I asked, and they replied, "Sure!" and held out their hands. I used the mop to good effect and there were no more jokes about it—at least, not in my hearing. But it became a cause of resentment among the boys that I did not use the mop on the girls.

"Why don't you lick Marjorie?" they asked. "She deserves it, too!"

"I will give Marjorie a different punishment," I said. But the boys were insistent that I should 'lick' the girls.

"Fred used to!" they said.

"Nonsense!" said I. But they all persisted about this.

"What was she punished for?" I asked.

The children grinned. "She was teasing him," they said. "What about?" I asked.

Ralph laughed. "About the whisky under his bed," he replied.

Then I realised that they enjoyed 'making the teacher git mad', and were prepared to risk a licking in doing so.

One night when the outside temperature was well below zero I was sitting marking books, very late. Except for the occasional faint 'plop' of a piece of wood-ash falling from my stove, there was complete silence. Suddenly, an ear-splitting crash on the wall just behind my head made my heart nearly jump out of my body. I dared not move, but sat fighting for composure, wondering how many pairs of eyes were centred on my unscreened windows. After casually turning pages for a few seconds, I got up and walked to the door, and slipped the bolt. Then I went through the curtained doorway into the darkness of my bedroom to recover.

The next morning I described the incident to the children and they laughed and told me that such sounds often occurred in the extreme cold; it was due to the contraction of the logs. A couple of weeks later I was busy ironing one night when there was a sudden crash on the roof. There came another report, and another, but I was not startled this time. I opened the door and called out, "Who's out there playing tricks? Come along in and have a cup of coffee!" After a long pause I heard approaching footsteps and Pete and Fred appeared, both looking a bit foolish.

"We thought you'd git mad!" they said.

Some weeks later, on a night when there was brilliant moonlight outside, with consequent black shadows around the house, there came a bang on the wall followed by a succession of crashes which shook the house.

"That will be Pete and Fred with time on their hands," I said to myself. "I shall have to organise another dance." I opened the door and called out into the shadows.

"All right, you two! Stop fooling and come and have some coffee."

I left the door ajar and went back into the house. A minute later a stone came hurtling through the window. This was discouraging: I had not thought there was that sort of a relationship between us. But firm action was needed.

"That is enough!" I called out. "I will deal with this in the morning!"

But to my consternation the noises went on, lumps of wood and stone being thrown on to the roof and walls of the house from all directions. I remembered a story I had been told about another isolated school in the same school district. An older woman teacher had been newly appointed, and one night the children had set out to torment her, lying on an overhanging rock and dropping stones on her house from above. The poor soul had been so frightened that she had stood all night pressed against the wall between two windows, and she had suffered a nervous breakdown afterwards. Well, they certainly would not get that sort of a reaction from me!

When the crashes were coming thick and fast on the back of the house I stepped out of the door at the front and closed it quietly behind me, standing in the black



shadow on the step. I strained my eyes to see if there was any movement in the bushes or behind the wood-pile, but the shadows were too thick. After a few minutes I heard undertones on my right, and then two figures ran across the sage twenty or thirty yards away. One stooped to pick up a stone, and I called out:

"All right, Pete and Fred! I've seen you!" They fled like a pair of rabbits.

A quarter of an hour later the crashes began again, and they went on until I had had more than enough. I decided that I must fetch someone to deal with the matter, although I was loth to leave the house untended; the miscreants seemed to be in a vicious mood. I put out all the lights so that it might appear that I had gone to bed; then dressed in warm outdoor clothing and slipped out of the door again. As I opened the door I was just in time to see three figures scamper off through the sage. Who could the third one be?

I walked down towards Henry's, enjoying the beauty of the night; the Northern Lights lit up the sky like batteries of searchlights in a ring behind the mountains. When I came to Henry's there was a saddle horse tied to the fence: if only I had not been a 'dumb' city dweller this would have told me all I needed to know, but I could not identify people by their horses yet. The house was in darkness and the inhabitants apparently fast asleep. The dogs, recognising me, made no commotion. I must go on further, hoping that Joe and Lila would still be up. But when I came to Joe's house I found that the thick shadow of the mountain lay over it, and I could not find my way in through the fence. The dogs created a great deal of

noise, but no one looked out, so I assumed the house was empty. The next house was Old Johnny's, a couple of miles further on, and I decided to return to my cabin. I was walking slowly up the valley when I became aware of a horse standing in the path about a hundred yards in front of me. I stopped. The horse stood there like an apparition, in a haze of silvery mist, and while I was trying to discern whether or not there was a rider on it, it turned up the mountain and vanished like a black, velvet-footed ghost. I still stood there, and then I heard hoofbeats behind me, pounding down the earth road. Fred was the only pupil who lived in that direction, so I called again, "All right, Fred! I've seen you!" When I came to Henry's house, the saddle horse had gone.

I anticipated that there would be some absentees the next morning, but I was wrong. As I washed up my breakfast dishes I counted the full complement playing outside the school. I went across and assembled them in school, and then addressed them coldly. "Take out your English books," I said. "You will write a composition on 'What I did Last Night'. You will all write on the same subject. I want a detailed account of everything you did, from the moment you left school until you went to bed." All the time I was searching for signs for any sign of consciousness of guilt, but I drew blank. Fred and Pete were as composed as usual: the others merely looked a little anxious at the coldness of my manner. I went on.

"I wish to talk to each one of you separately. Pete, you will be first: go across to my house. Marjorie, you are in charge here: no one will move out of his place until I

come for him." I followed Pete out in a hushed silence.

I put Pete to sit down facing the light, and I opened the interview.

"Well, what have you to say?" I asked sternly.

"What about?" said Pete. His face was like a mask.

"About last night!"

"Last night?"

"Yes: I want to know how you spent it."

"Why, just like any other night."

"Where did you sleep?" I asked. There was a momentary pause. Pete had been staying at Joe's house, I knew.

"At Fred's."

"I thought you were staying at Joe's?"

"I was, but Joe and Lila took some cattle up the mountain yesterday."

"So you slept at Fred's."

"Yes." I looked at him searchingly.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"Yes!"

"What time did you go to bed?"

"About ten o'clock."

"What were you doing between nine and ten?"

"Er . . . Cecil was showing me how to play the guitar."

I was not satisfied with these answers, but Pete was so poker-faced that it did not appear that I should get any more out of him.

"Very well!" I said. "Stand there."

I left him standing by the wall and went over to school to fetch Fred. Not a word was spoken, but ten pairs of eyes followed me as I went down the room. I decided to be more direct with Fred.

"Why did you come throwing stones at my house last night?" I asked.

"I did not!" said Fred.

"You did. I saw you. I spoke to you."

"Not to me!" Fred's eyes, too, were veiled and his expression impassive.

"Yes; to you! You were riding down towards Joe's."

"I was not," said Fred.

"What time did you go to bed?"

"About ten, I guess."

"Where was Pete?"

"Er—at Joe's."

"I think he was at your house!" I said.

"No; he's staying at Joe's."

"But he spent last night at your house?" I insisted. Pete began to interpose a remark, but I silenced him.

"No!" said Fred.

"Where did he sleep?"

"I dunno."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

I looked enquiringly at Pete, who began to stammer something to the effect that he had stayed at Fred's a couple of nights ago. It was pretty obvious that Pete was involved.

"Fred," I said, "some boys from this school were throwing stones at my house last night. I want you to tell me what you know about it."

"I don't know anything about it."

"Is that the truth?"

"Yes."

I pondered. If Pete was the ringleader, who were his confederates? It was very questionable whether the little Higginbottoms would walk so far at night just to throw stones; Henry's family were not allowed out after dark. Minnie and Arthur were very unlikely culprits. I put Fred beside Pete, and went and fetched the others one by one. Marjorie knew nothing about it; nor did Ralph or Viva or Floyd. Arthur and Minnie looked quite startled, so I ruled them out. I suspected Michael because I knew that he liked to play tricks, but he scorned the suggestion that he would take part in such a silly scheme. Douglas and Dick sturdily denied any knowledge of the attack, and Edgar, though he giggled a little, was equally emphatic. I sent all back to school.

After the morning break I addressed them all together, and described exactly what had happened, inviting each one of them individually to tell me what part he took in the affair. No one knew anything about it. I continued:

"Very well! This much is certain. There are three children in this valley who are cowards. No matter how brave they may be at riding a bucking horse or stalking a moose, they are nevertheless cowards."

Pete was sitting up straight and gazing at me fixedly.

"Cowards?" said Fred.

"Yes; of course!" I replied. "They chose to attack me because I was a woman and they knew there was no danger of my being able to catch them and give them a licking. If I had been a man, or if I had had a husband, or even a near neighbour, they would not have attempted it. That is one reason why I know they are cowards. But there is another reason, too! They could put things right

by owning up: that needs courage of a different sort. But they have not got that, either. They are still afraid of punishment. That is why I know they are cowards."

Pete's gaze had never wavered. I now dismissed the subject and resumed my cordial relationship with them, but I secretly hoped that I might have touched a chord somewhere that would result in a confession.

The next day while I was having my lunch there came a knock at my door.

"Come in!" I called. Pete entered, looking rather subdued. He held in his hand a broken ruler.

"Hallo, Pete," I said. "What's happened?"

"I broke the ruler," Pete replied.

"How did you do that?" I asked.

"I was levering up a nail." Pete looked at the piece of cardboard in my window frame and said in a low voice: "But I did not break your window!"

I saw in a flash what he was trying to tell me. "You did throw stones, though?" I asked. He nodded.

"You and Fred?" I asked. Pete was silent.

"I suppose Michael was the third," I went on.

But Pete said quickly, "No! It was not anyone from the school!"

Then I understood! A young lad who had been in trouble with the police in town had been sent out to the valley and Henry had undertaken to keep an eye on him. It was this young fellow, with his grudge against society, who had been the ringleader. So Fred had ridden up to Henry's during the evening, and the three of them had embarked on this little expedition to 'make the teacher git mad', Fred leaving his horse tied to the fence. Without any

suggestion from me, Pete brought money to pay for the broken window, and we had a conference to decide on further punishment. I told the two boys that since they were too big to be licked they would have to pay for their fun in some other way, and in the end it was decided that they should chop wood and carry water for me, whenever I wanted it during the day, from then until the end of the term. (I often gave wood-chopping as a punishment. It was a constructive penalty, building up a wood-pile for the school heater, and at the same time enabling a boy to get rid of his feelings of aggression.) The next time the rancher who was School Trustee went past the school in his car I signalled to him to stop. I told him the whole story and he visited the parents and told them that the children would not have a teacher the next year if they did not behave themselves.

One morning in February Fred came to school with exciting news: there were fresh cougar tracks crossing the road just below Henry's Place. Hector had seen them in the moonlight on the previous night and Walter had gone off at first light with Benny, his dog, to track the beast. A cougar is a mountain lion, like a puma, and I thought privately that Fred's story was a bit of schoolboy-sensationalism, but in the afternoon we went for a nature walk to see any tracks there might be. I shall never forget the thrill I had when we came upon them; a cloudless cobalt sky rested on top of the dazzling white mountain ranges. The tracks were deep-cut in the virgin snow from the top of one range, down over the road, across the creek on a bridge of ice and up the opposite slope till we lost them

among the trees. Freckles, the pointer, was with us and as soon as we came to the tracks he put his nose down and was off like an arrow from a bow, and in the first excitement we went streaming after him. The children were far ahead of me, of course, and they called out their interpretation of the story in the tracks which they could see across the valley.

"See the coyote tracks trailing her!" they called. "See where she nearly slipped into the gulch?"

The next morning at breakfast time the children invaded my cabin with cries of "Walter got the cougar!" and "Bill's caught a bob-cat!" so I postponed school work and decided that we would go out for some first-hand nature study. The cougar was to be skinned that morning, so we set off at once for the three-mile walk down the valley. When we arrived at Old Johnny's we found that Cecil and Walter had just begun the skinning process: the big cat hung from a beam, looking wicked even in death. I admired her smooth, tawny skin and the big, black, velvety paws with their ferocious-looking claws. I asked Walter to tell me the story of the kill. To-day was his twenty-second birthday and the bounty of \$40 which the Government paid for the slaughter of a cougar—owing to the amount of damage they do among the herds on the range—would make an acceptable birthday present. Whenever I had read magazine stories of cougar hunts they had concerned a hunting party of numbers of men and hounds, and I could not believe that this young man had tackled the problem alone.

Walter, accompanied by his black retriever, Benny, had gone out on horseback, following the tracks of the cougar



over the bridge of ice and up the Saddle Horse Trail till he came to the Wild Horse Corral. Here there was the carcass of a cow: he saw from the tracks that the cougar had put her feet on the cow's back to smell the carcass. Then she had gone on up the mountainside till she came to a cave, in which she had spent the night. The next day—that was yesterday—she had gone up to Deer Spring and walked round the knolls till she came to a cliff. Walter circled the cliff, but found no more tracks, so he whispered to Benny, "Seek 'em!" and the dog leapt over the cliff, found the cougar asleep in the sunshine and sank his teeth in her flank. She woke, began to run down the mountain and then turned and tackled the dog. She seized him by the throat and began to shake him like a rat. Benny squealed, but Walter dare not shoot at first for fear of killing the dog. Then, seeing that Benny was choking, he shot, hitting the cougar in the head. She fell on top of Benny, who struggled out from under her and went tearing down the mountainside, half crazy. The cougar got up on her front legs and Walter shot again. Benny now came running back, and seeing the cougar's legs twitching, pluckily sprang to the attack again, but she was dead. Then Walter had to haul her on to his saddle and make the long journey home. 2.

While the children watched the skinning, I went indoors to talk to Melanie. When I came out again they said, "Look at Freckles!"

I looked at him, and my jaw dropped.

"What on earth have you been doing?" I said. Freckles' stomach looked like a sackstuffed with cotton wadding. The boys had been cutting off lumps of cougar meat and

throwing them to the dog. They said he had eaten about twelve pounds. Freckles certainly feasted royally for days; my pans were full of stewing cougar meat, and it smelt very good, too. I bought the handsome skin from Walter for \$5, and sent it to Vancouver to be mounted as a rug: soon it adorned the polished floor in the bedroom of my log cabin.

February 14th, the Feast of St. Valentine, like Halloween, is a popular Canadian festival, but I felt that this occasion called for a party for the grown-ups. I asked the children if their big brothers and sisters would like to come to a dance in the schoolhouse, and they said, "Sure! We'll come, too!" I said, "No; this will be too late; You must go to bed." But they insisted, as they had done before, that any function in the school would be attended by the whole population in the valley. So they wrote invitations again and we spent another afternoon spring-cleaning. It was more difficult this time because the water froze in the pails on the way from the creek, and after we had heated it we had no sooner poured it on the floor than it froze again and stuck to the mop. However, we managed to make everything sparkle and span, and after we had decorated the room with Victorian silhouettes and pierced hearts and Cupids and lover's knots—and the glow from the stove was reflected in the polished desks—the room looked very cosy and inviting.

It gave promise of being a lovely night. About five o'clock I went across to take some dishes into the school and when I came out again I held my breath. At the top end of the valley, where the two mountain ranges seemed to meet, the moon was rising like a great golden platter

out of a dove-grey sea. A few moments later the grey was lavender, and the lemon-coloured moon was encircled by a wide, hazy, lemon-coloured halo. The snow-covered mountains were dyed pink from the 'after-glow' at the lower end of the valley, where the sky was filled with pink and copper-gilded little clouds. Later on, when the silver moon was riding high, I stood there again, feeling as though I was part of a scene from a Grimm's fairy tale. A sleigh-load of people was coming up the valley, singing to the accompaniment of the bells on the horse's harness and the strains of melody from Cecil's guitar. When they arrived the babies were lifted down like little cocoons and put to sleep in their blankets on the carpenter's bench at the back of the school. Soon the musicians were strumming and the room was a-whirl. This was not an occasion for the wearing of the blue lace frock, of course; stetsons and gay neckerchiefs were the vogue, with check shirts and jeans, or flared skirts to rotate like spinning tops in the 'everybody swing' movement of the square dances. The day before, in school, the children had asked me, "What shall you do if they bring liquor?" and I, unaware that there is a strict law against liquor at dances, replied, "They can bring liquor if they like. They are grown-up. But if anyone is less than a gentleman he will not be asked back!" I told them to explain to their parents that this was a school and not a dance hall, and that behaviour must be circumspect. But I was not worried this time: I had found a natural courtesy among the people of the valley—even though it might be sometimes roughly expressed.

The orchestra consisted of two fiddles and a guitar. Ernest was a fine fiddler who could throw his bow up into

the air and catch it without interrupting the rhythm of the piece he was playing. Blind Uncle John also played the fiddle with abandon, and Cecil and Walter took turns at playing the guitar. Men were in the majority: the only partners available for them at first were the three school-girls and myself and Melanie, but we all danced vigorously, making the floor-boards rock, while Ernest 'called' the figures in an almost unintelligible jargon. It sounded something like 'Birdie in the cage and Birdie in the air. Swing your Honey and I don't care. Take your Honey to a nice soft chair. Take your Honey any old where.'

As the night wore on more dancers arrived, including Jack and Mannie. I now met for the first time the man for whom the children had built the annexe to my house. Jack was a slim young fellow in a black cowboy outfit, wearing a black hat with a narrow white strap round it. Mannie was very tall and slim, with an expression of perpetual astonishment, owing to the fact that his eyes bulged somewhat. These two behaved in a rather peculiar way, and as we made the circle in the 'grand chain,' I gazed at them searchingly. Mannie gave me a limp hand and gazed back, looking somewhat apprehensive. After that dance Mannie went out and I did not see him again. It never occurred to me that bottles of home-brew had been cached among the hay in the loft in the school barn. Jack sat strumming on the guitar and singing, and lapsing into giggles. A group of the children gathered round him, so at last I went to Ernest, who was M.C., and told him to ask Jack to sober up or go home. Ernest said, 'Oh, let's give him a little time!' but when after the next dance Jack was still staggering about I went across the room and sat

beside him. I could not have drunkenness inside the school. I said:

"Jack, will you come across to my house and have a talk with me?"

"Why, sure!" said Jack obligingly. As we went out of the door Cecil and Young Alfie tagged along behind; I was not sure whether they were constituting themselves as a bodyguard for me or for Jack. The two boys stood with their long legs backed up to my stove as I told Jack my objection to his condition.

"This is not a public dance hall," I said; "it is a school, and nothing must go on in it which is not the right example to the young!" This was something which needed to be said.

Jack was very polite. He had been brought up in a Roman Catholic mission and knew how to behave. He said:

"These children are used to drunkenness. They see it every day of their lives."

I asked him if he was content to be drunk, and he hung his head a little.

"Did you have a hero when you were a boy?" I asked.

"I surely did!" said Jack, and he told me about his hero.

"Did you not model your conduct on his?" I asked.

"Yes, I did," he replied.

"Well," I said, "you are a hero to these boys; give them the finest model you possibly can. Give them something to copy that is the best you are capable of!"

I offered him some strong coffee and we went back to the dance, which continued till 5 a.m. By this time most of the children were sprawled across the desks, fast asleep,

and I felt utterly exhausted, but everyone else seemed as fresh as ever.

A few days after the dance something happened which depressed and perplexed me. Freckles was now an accepted member of my household, and since during the mornings, when I was in school, the fire in my house would go out, I used to let Freckles come over to school and lie at the back of the room. One day, just before afternoon school, Henry came up the road on horseback and as he was passing the school he stopped to speak to the children playing on the mountainside. One of the boys came down and asked me if Henry could take Freckles up the mountain with him. I said, "Certainly!" I was pleased for Freckles to have some exercise. He gambolled ahead of the horse, his tail carried high, and I envied them both their adventure in the cold, crisp sunshine. That evening I watched for their return in vain. I assumed they were staying overnight at Grandma Grinder's cabin. The next morning, in school, I asked where Freckles was, but nobody seemed to know. The following day I asked again, and answers were again evasive. I asked with some insistence, and at last somebody said, "Freckles is dead!"

"Dead!" I exclaimed, with a gasp. "How did he die?"

Again no answer was forthcoming, but I returned to the subject.

"What has happened to Freckles?" I insisted.

"Henry shot him!" said Fred, at last.

I was aghast. What had I done to invite such an unfriendly act? I was so much upset that I had to go out of school to my house to recover. When I came back, after

a few minutes, the children were uneasy. I talked to them and told them that on these winter days, after they had gone home from school, I had no one to talk to, and Freckles had been a real companion to me.

"In an English family," I said, "the people would as soon think of shooting the baby as of shooting the dog!"

"Shooting the baby!" they echoed. They thought I was crazy. On calmer reflection I could see Henry's side of the case, and realised that my comments had been extravagant. After all the dog did not belong to me, but to Pete. (I heard later that he had paid Pete a dollar for it.) And since dogs were supposed to live out of doors and work for their keep, Freckles, by his standards, was a useless piece of apparatus. So he shot him.

Not long after this Viva brought me a kitten. (It did not occur to me at the time that this was perhaps a conciliatory gesture.) I had never kept a cat and did not know what companionable little animals they can be, but I appreciated the kind intention and took the kitten in. He was an excellent mouser and would sit on the deep sill when my window was open and leap out into the darkness every now and again--to reappear with a mouse. This was very satisfactory, as I was still waging war on the rodents, but I did not approve of his choice of my bed for a mortuary. One night he jumped up to the window from the outside, but fell back again. I went out to see what was the matter. It was very dark and he did not appear to be anywhere about, so I went inside again. When I went to bed I left the window open. I woke up next morning to find the little cat lying on my bed in a pool of blood. In his neck was a round red hole. I

moistened his lips with milk and tried to make him comfortable, but I was seething with rage. When the first children came to school I told them, "Somebody has shot my cat!"

"Oh!" said Viva in shocked tones.

But Ralph was more practical. "Is he dead?" he asked. I shook my head.

"Then nobody shot him," he said. "Let's see!" They came into the bedroom and bent over the kitten. Then both spoke at once: "He's been attacked by a horned owl!" they said. It seemed that in this valley cats did not have nine lives. Three young cats in a distance of a mile or so had succumbed to the attack of a horned owl. I tried to nurse the suffering little animal, but the wound began to smell, and as I saw Alfie passing on his way to the river I signalled to him, and he took my kitten away in a sack. It was a great grief to me.

On the next Stage day after the Valentine party the mail truck stopped on the road above the school in the afternoon on its way up the valley. I sent Edgar up to see what the driver wanted, and he came tottering back with a lovely case of Macintosh red apples. I assumed that these had come down from the store at Jesmond, and the driver had forgotten to leave them on the way down. I was very glad to have them; I had had no fresh fruit since the Fall. Then, a few nights later, came the explanation. I had that day fixed up a strong wire clothes-line, on a pulley, reaching from my house to the school. I had just put out my big lamp that night, preparatory to going to bed, when I heard wild cowboy yells and the thunder of galloping hoofs. I thrust my head out of the open window



and hollered: "Watch out for the clothes line!" because if they had gone on down the slope they might have been dehatted, if not decapitated. It was a pitch dark night. A surprised voice said:

"Hey! You're supposed to be skeered!"

"Am I?" I said. "Who is it?"

"It's a couple of wild men!" was the reply. One voice broke into song.

"Well, come in," I said, "and let me see who you are."

"Come in!" they said, and I heard sounds of dismounting. I opened my door and Mannie and Norman (Michael's half-brother) staggered into the house. Norman carried a bottle of whisky and urged me to have a drink: when I said I did not like whisky he said he would take the lariat off his horse and tie me up and pour the whole bottleful down my throat. I said I did not like castor oil either, or rice pudding: it was just that I did not like the taste of it. Mannie told me that there was sanction in the Bible for drinking.

"Let me tell you something, Teacher!" he said. "That . . . what's His name? . . . that Guy they put on a cross . . . well, they were having a meeting or something once and He said, 'Fill those pitchers with water!' . . ." And he told the story of the miracle quite well. But Mannie had come with a purpose: there was something troubling him. He said, "I want to apologise for making such a horse-fool of myself at that dance. Gee! you gave me a wicked look! I thought I'd better get out. I said to myself, 'Get out of here, son!' " He was very anxious to know if he had been rude to me: he did not think for a moment that he would insult me, drunk or sober, but the

others had told him that I had taken him and Jack over to my house and given them a good 'talking-to,' and that he had responded by calling me 'a string of dirty names.' He was so scared that this might be true that he had sent me a box of Macintosh red apples of his own growing as a peace offering. I reassured him about his behaviour and thanked him very much for his gift.

During the winter months the school had been in shadow all day, but now the morning sun was beginning to spill down the mountain-slopes opposite, and every day it advanced a little further. When I awoke in the mornings I glanced, not at the clock, but at the mountains, gauging the time from the position of the line where sunshine and shadow met. There would be enough heat in the sunshine to thaw the surface of the snow during the day, but at night this froze again, making a dangerous surface to walk on. One glorious Sunday morning I set off for the creek with my pails and went running down the slope into the bushes. Suddenly my feet shot from under me and I crashed down on my back, striking my right elbow and the back of my head with great force on the ice. I was brought to my senses by the chill of the moisture seeping through my clothing, and struggled to my feet and wove my way back to the cabin. I got between blankets as fast as I could, and did not wake again until about three o'clock in the afternoon. The fire had been out for hours and my pails were still empty, but there was just enough water in the kettle for a cup of tea. I wrote 'Help' in white chalk on the outside of the door in large letters, hoping that someone might see it from the road. Then I went to bed again.

and slept till morning, by which time I was ravenously hungry, but otherwise none the worse.

In school I told the children what had happened. Some of the boys had been around, but seeing my door shut had thought I did not wish to be disturbed. They made little comment, but the next Sunday afternoon I had such a crowd of visitors that my four tea-cups had to be used in relays; and as it was easier now for movement in the valley, from then on passers-by on the road above would always wave down to me to establish contact.

The weather was now warm enough for the children to play outside and I used to wonder where they all disappeared to at morning break. One day I decided to follow them. They ran down to the creek and crossed by a log that spanned the stream; where the ice had gone, dark patches of open water boiled below. Michael and Douglas were across in a twinkling, but Floyd hesitated. He studied the hazards, then went down on all fours and crossed like a bear cub. I could not allow myself to be beaten by this little boy, but my heart was in my mouth as I stepped across on the slippery log. Once across, I had to find the boys by sound as they had disappeared in the underbrush.

Michael had set a trap for squirrels halfway up a pine tree. There were no branches to give foothold on the lower part of the trunk, so he climbed on to a tall stump nearby and took a flying leap on to the pine tree! Then he stepped delicately from slender branch to branch until he reached his trap. It was empty.

Douglas was luckier: his trap contained a squirrel which had only just been caught and was still struggling.

He kicked it on the head and killed it at once. The next job was to skin it. He first made a 'stretcher' on which to peg the skin to dry. This was a flat piece of wood with a curved point at the top—the shape of a church window. He took his squirrel and slit it up both the back legs, and pulled the skin off the tail as you peel a glove off a finger. Douglas was not very adept at skinning and the others laughed at his efforts, especially when he cut off the squirrel's ear.

It had worried me at first that the dominant instinct of these children was to kill, and I urged them to leave the squirrels and chipmunks to run about the woods. But I came to realise that wild animals represented to them a source of subsistence: they provided meat to eat and a means of obtaining money to buy such things as shoes and shirts. It was the equivalent of the city child's newspaper round.

## Chapter VII

### 'SOCIAL STUDIES'

SPRING was coming! Its advent was heralded by the rounding up of the horses on top of the mountain range, and their arrival in the valley ready for the activities of the summer. In the late autumn the horses are driven up the mountains and left there, so that they can move freely and forage for themselves during the winter. Some of them fall victims to wolves and cougars and some slip into gulches, breaking their legs, and are devoured by the coyotes. They all become very thin. In the spring they are rounded up, together with the colts that have been born on the range, and are brought down the mountainside.

Henry and Annie went riding past the school one morning followed by Patsy, the collic, and her pup, and for the rest of the day it was difficult to keep the children's eyes from the windows. But it was not until late afternoon that the party returned, riding into the sunset. Annie was leading, followed by a belled horse: streaming after them, with flowing manes and tails, came the long line of horses driven by Henry and Young Alfie.

A few days later Ralph came to school with the news that the rancher at the Big Bar Ranch, Mr. Cromic, was going to de-horn his cattle on Saturday, and asked if I would like to go and watch the operation. I had noticed that the Hereford cattle, which I had seen about the mountain pastures were hornless, and I had assumed that

in some way they were bred hornless. Ralph arrived at my cabin door about eight o'clock on the Saturday morning, leading a horse for me to ride. It was a lovely breezy morning as we rode towards the river, with the sky a brilliant blue and the regimented peaks still tipped and streaked with snow. Alongside the creek, which roared below us, the pussy willows were budded with silver, and there were already a few blades of green sprouting among the withered grey of the winter grass.

After a ride of four or five miles we came within sight of the Big Bar Ranch with the Fraser Canyon beyond it; we could see that the river was still fringed with ice. The cowboys had been out since dawn rounding up the cattle, and as they began to come in Ralph and Arthur and I chose points of vantage from which to view the proceedings. I elected to sit on the top rail of an empty corral, but was ordered off, and I soon discovered why.

'The cattle were assembled in one of the corrals, from which a 'chute,' admitting the animals in single file, led to the branding corral. This passage ended in a gate the top half of which could be raised by lifting one of the rails. Henry stood holding this top half open. Cowboys straddled the top rails of the chute and induced the first victim to advance and look over the lower half of the gate, when Henry immediately dropped the top half—which had a semicircular opening in it to fit the beast's neck—and its head was held in a vice. The cowboys had to be agile because the beasts were wild, and at a time went on they became increasingly obstinate and terrified and were liable to leap upwards, threshing their forelimbs through the gaps between the rails.

Mr. Cromie now held the nose of the animal with the 'bug,' a pincer-like implement with a rope threaded through the handles in such a way that tension of the rope increased the force of the grip: thus, the more the animal struggled the more securely it was held. The horns were now cut with long-handled shears right back close to the head, and the blood spurted out. If the bleeding was bad the wound was dressed with some medicament or cauterised with an instrument taken out of the branding fire. Then the gate was kicked open and the hornless beast staggered into the empty corral, seeking something on which to vent its rage. That was why I had been ordered off the rail.

I could not stomach much of this sort of spectacle, and went up to the ranch house to talk to Mrs. Cromie. She explained that the horns must be cut back in this way, partly because otherwise the animals would injure each other on the range, and partly because the cattle are required to be hornless when they are shipped for slaughter. They are driven into the train wagons by way of a narrow chute and if they jostle each other the meat is bruised and so not marketable. I asked if the horns could not be stunted at birth, and was reminded that the calves are born on the range and can only be dealt with at round-up.

Before fixing a date for de-horning and castrating his beasts, the rancher consults an almanac, choosing a day when the auspices are favourable. The blood is said to be in certain quarters of the body according to the sign of the Zodiac which is in the ascendance, and no rancher in his senses would de-horn on a day when the blood is in the

head. If he did, and—as rarely happens—one of the calves bled to death, everyone would say, "Well, what did he expect?"

By the time I returned to the corrals the men were dealing with the younger cattle, and their skill in handling them was a joy to watch. A bunch of calves was herded into the top corral and all gates were closed. When all was ready, the big gate was opened and Henry trotted in and circled the corral. I did not even see him throw the lasso among the frightened animals, but the next moment he was trotting out with a steer in tow. The gate was shut behind him and as he went by Alfie lassoed the steer by the back leg while someone else did the same by the fore leg. The steer was thrown and every available man held on to the ropes, which were wrapped round the strongest logs in the fence. Having often tried to hold a dog while I cut its toe-nails I could have some idea of the strength needed to hold a struggling calf. Some of the calves had to be de-horned, castrated, branded with hot irons and ear-marked (a notch cut out of the ear) all in one operation. The smell of the smoke sizzling upwards and the sickening 'crunch' of the shears turned my stomach. When they were released the animals appeared dazed and stood bellowing, with the blood dripping in pools around them. It is very exhausting work for the cowboys, and they do not enjoy inflicting pain on the beasts, but a hungry world cries out for meat and this is the usual way of dealing with cattle in the mass.

On our way back from the round-up, Ralph stopped to loosen the girth of his horse and took time to look behind us. Below were the tiny, distant ranch buildings, the



canyon, the roof-top of the ranch house. All around were the pastures and the mountain ranges, and miles away were three cowboys galloping in line, tiny specks, as they drove some animals up to a pasture. Then they turned and came down the mountain like the wind. Ralph said that the last man had to shut the gate, and they were racing each other down to it. That picture, like a scene in silhouette in a miniature theatre, is vivid in my memory.

When we rode down to Big Bar Ranch we took the right-hand path at the fork of the roads. I wanted to know what lay along the other road, so one Sunday afternoon at the end of April I borrowed Marjorie's mare, Priscilla, and went exploring. How often, in the silence and beauty of these surroundings, I returned thanks that I was a part of them! I could not understand why my city friends, when writing to me, commiserated with me on the privations of the life I was leading. Sunday afternoon recreation in the city would involve the frustrations of waiting for buses and jostling among crowds, shut in by the witness of man's power; here in the wilderness I was in the midst of a natural beauty which provided a perpetual monument to the power of God.

I rode for a way through green bowers, and then came to a blind curve, flanked on the inside by rocky walls and on the outer side by a precipitous drop to the creek, 300 feet or so below. I wondered how the rancher managed to drive his truck along it without disaster: there were only a few inches to spare outside the wheel-tracks. Priscilla objected to walking close to the overhanging wall of rock and would insist on following the outside edge of the curve, and my heart was in my mouth. However, at last

we had negotiated it, and found ourselves out on the range with meadow-larks whistling over rolling grassland and with distant glimpses of the Fraser River flowing between rock-bound walls.

I met the rancher trying to bring up a cow with a new-born calf. She was on my side of the fence, so I offered my help. He was sure I could not manage it, as the cow was wild, but I could not let such a chance go by. So, with the expert help of Priscilla, I brought them up. The cow gave us a wicked look now and again, but she was not aggressive. After a pleasant meal with the rancher and his wife, I set off for home. On the way back at one point, hearing a hiss, I looked behind. A cream-and-brown snake, a good yard long, was just gliding over the edge. If it had crossed Priscilla's path and she had shied, I should have hurtled down to the cottonwood trees below.

We had another dance before Easter. It was a delightful party. Everyone behaved beautifully and Jack was perfectly sober. I had told the children that the previous dance had been spoilt for me, so after this one they asked anxiously if I had enjoyed it. I said, "Yes, very much," and asked them to thank everyone for me.

By now the progress the children were making in the formal subjects had become very noticeable. The pupils in Grades 1, 2 and 3 were all near the end of their arithmetic syllabus for the year: Viva, in Grade 3, had already gone on to the Grade 4 book. Douglas still had difficulty with reading, but he had worked with determination at hand-writing and was now producing a written composition every week. Arthur had resolved his difficulties with

number: I had come to the conclusion that his backwardness had been due to the fact that he had been too shy to ask for help when he did not understand. Pete was attending regularly at last and making progress. Fred, in Grade 5, was keeping level with Edgar for the first time. Fred had a stutter in his speech, and I had thought that perhaps he had been pressed to read too early, but when I heard the story of an incident that had happened to him in childhood I revised my opinion. When he was about five years old he had been playing on the mountain-side behind his home one sunny spring day; he was cutting out paper houses, and happily occupied, when suddenly a shadow passed across the sun, the chickens fled squawking up the ditch and a swooping eagle seized Fred and tried to carry him off. One claw grabbed his shoulder and the other tore at his mouth. Fred screamed in terror and the yellow hound came flying out of the house, but could not get under the fence. An elder brother had heard the scream, however, and he came running. When he saw what was happening, he grabbed the bench axe, cleared the fence at a bound and struck off the eagle's head with the axe. The bird's wings measured ten feet across. They carried the little boy into the house, but he was ill for a long time afterwards. I supposed that the impediment in his speech might be a legacy from the shock which he had suffered then.

Floyd and Dick were making pleasing improvement. It was obvious from Floyd's gay and vigorous drawings that he had a lively brain; he romped away with number work, but his progress in reading was still slow. Dick could now read and write and produce short compositions without help.

The nature diary by this time contained entries with little tales of adventures which would turn an English boy green with envy:

'On Saturday I went with Joe to Stinking Lake, hunting horses. We were riding along when we saw a wolf. He ran away and we chased him. We did not have a gun.' (*Arthur.*)

'A big black bear was going up the hill and we told Bingo and he barked at the bear. We sent Bingo after the bear and he caught up to it and bit it. The bear got angry and slapped Bingo and knocked him down. Bingo was tired. The bear was going up the hill: he climbed the bluffs and we lost sight of him.' (*Minnie.*)

'One night we heard something scratching on a broom and Dad thought it was a cat. We had forgotten to shut the door and a porcupine came in and was going to quill Marjorie and Roy. It climbed up the wall and Jean got the gun and Dad shot it.' (*Ralph.*)

'Yesterday Bill trapped a bob-cat. It came and killed eight of his chickens in the night. Bill found two chickens lying in a corner too scared to get up; he put them in an old box outside the house. That night Bill set two traps for the cat. He trapped it by the left hind foot. The cat dragged the trap over to the fence and got caught on the rail. Bill went out in the morning and the cat started to spit at him, so he fetched the gun and shot her.' (*Edgar.*)

The finest medium of education is experience, and the

experience of my pupils with regard to the civilisation of which they were supposed to be a part was extremely limited. I was required to fill them with facts about continents and oceans when they could visualise no geographical conditions other than those of their own valley; to train them to keep such rules of health as that of a daily bath when their only source of water supply was under ice a foot deep; to encourage interest in the achievements of the United Nations when they did not know how to read a newspaper intelligently. From the point of view of modern civilised life, these children started with a severe handicap; they never heard even mentioned many topics which are a common-place among 'educated' people. The fact that they had fallen so far below the standards of a city child indicated not lack of intelligence but lack of experience. It became my aim to do something to improve this situation. Although my own opinion was that they were amply compensated by their experience of wilderness life for what they missed of civilisation—having first-hand knowledge of things that the city child had to study from books—yet since the educational system required them to know more about 'citizenship,' I proposed to introduce them to its manifestations in fact and in deed, and not merely by word.

I had been working for months on a plan to take the whole group of children to the city of Kamloops to see what high school education really meant. This had involved persistent correspondence, first with the Principal of the Kamloops High School, who was surprised but co-operative, then with the Department of Education and with my own School Board. The Department gave a

cautious consent to the scheme, provided the School Board acquiesced. So I wrote to the Secretary of the School Board and said that I had the consent of the Department, and would they agree? They needed reassurance that my project would involve them in no financial outlay, and a written 'waiver' from the parents, to the effect that they would not hold the School Board responsible for compensation in the event of an accident, and then authorised me to carry on. It now remained for me to find the necessary funds. I wrote to the I.O.D.E., who immediately voted us \$50, and to the Parent-Teachers' Association of the Queen Mary School in Vancouver, who sent us \$25. There were all sorts of difficulties. If we went by bus, we should have to travel in the middle of the night. There was no train nearer than Ashcroft. So we must go by taxi. I wrote to the taxi-driver at Clinton, who was so much inspired by the idea that he offered the services of himself and his wife without charge -- a gesture that was worth \$25 to us. I was prepared to foot the rest of the bill myself.

The biggest problem, however, was the question of accommodation for the children in Kamboos. I wondered if the High School pupils would be responsible for this, and in time I received a brief note from the Principal saying that the girls of the 'Hi Y.' Club (i.e. the High School branch of the Y.W.C.A.) would look after them. I thought perhaps they were making one of the school rooms into a dormitory for them, or putting them up in a hostel.

I had asked each of the children to bring \$2 towards the cost of the trip; they could not afford more, in view of the necessity to buy clothing and to reserve a little for

pocket-money. I was very much disappointed when Henry declined to allow his children to come with us. I thought perhaps he could not raise the money, and I went to see him; I had looked forward to hearing Floyd's comments on the wonders of civilisation. He was adamant; none of them could go. I pointed out that Marjorie was the senior pupil and should represent the school, and at last he relented to the extent of permitting her to come. It was not until after we returned, and they were all eager to write compositions about what they had done, that I learnt from Ralph's composition his father's reason for keeping him at home. "While the children of Big Bar Creek School went to Kamloops," he wrote, "I had to stay at home and hoe potatoes and mind young calves."

On Wednesday, May 11th, nine children gathered at the Mountain House at Jesmond with smiling faces, tightly-clutched grips and, I am sure, fast-beating hearts. The two taxis were there waiting and we had a seven-hour journey ahead of us—first for miles and miles through forests on a switchback road; then on the high-road, alongside canyons, over bridges, across railways, bordering lakes, till at last we saw the roofs of Kamloops below us. About 7 p.m. we were parked outside the High School, hot, exhausted and hungry. A High School student who had been watching for us came over and took us to her home, where we sat in a cool sitting-room while she made numerous telephone calls. Then her schoolmates began to arrive to claim their protégés: they were entertaining the children in their own homes, and whisked them away to wash and change and eat a huge supper. That first evening, in spite of the effects of

the journey, they were ready to be taken out to see the sights of the town: stores, neon lights, roller-skating, ice-cream parlours, street cars.

The next morning we met at the school and I heard of their thrill at having not only beds, but bedrooms, to themselves. Some of them had thought that the toilet was a foot-bath and had had fun splashing in it; they had wondered, also, to see hot water run out of a tap. While I talked to the Principal of the High School to plan some activities, the children were taken round and introduced to the classes by their hostesses. Little Dick was the darling of the girls in Grade 12.

We spent the first half-hour at a music class, the Music Master explaining to us the different wind instruments of the orchestra and letting his pupils demonstrate their use. We then went on to the local Broadcast Station to see what goes to the making of a radio programme; this developed into a long, informal interview which was recorded and broadcast during the lunch-hour. Some of the people in Big Bar Creek heard it. Douglas, of course, created a diversion by collapsing backwards through swinging on the back legs of his chair, but the commentator worked it all in naturally. Every child spoke a few words on the air. The commentator asked them what they had for breakfast and they described their repasts, and then he said, "Well, do you have that in Big Bar Creek, too?" "No!" said Dick. "What do you have there?" asked the interviewer. Nobody could think what they had. Then Michael said in a loud voice, "Mush!" (porridge) and everyone laughed.

After lunch the Principal himself took the children



round the school, and then we attended an instructional film in the Art Room. We were invited to visit the office of the Kamloops *Sentinel*, and saw some of the processes that go to the making of a newspaper. Next we went to the Museum, where the History Master from the school explained the exhibits; and the children saw historic Indian relics and stuffed animals and birds. These were displayed so naturally that at first they thought they were alive. After school there was a baseball practice in the Park, so I took the children down there and left them enjoying the green grass and watching the play. That night their hostesses took them all to the movies.

The next day (Friday) was a school holiday on account of the May Day celebrations: it was quite by accident that I had chosen this week. We watched the parade in the morning: all the local schools were represented, and there were decorated cars and floats and children's bicycles and perambulators. We followed the parade to the Park and joined the crowds watching the maypole dancing (there were five maypoles) and Japanese ceremonial dancing and gipsy dancing, and a fine display of vaulting by the boys of the Indian Residential School. The Big Bar Creek children had all been given free tickets for 'pop' and ice-cream, and Michael enjoyed himself very much, collecting empty bottles for the ladies at the booths and earning hot-dogs. They took part in the sports, and they watched the swimming and diving in the river. They were amazed by the numbers of children: never had they seen so many in one place.

That night there was a party for the children in one of the homes. It was a wonderful party, beginning with

croquet on the lawn and developing into an informal softball match in the field, followed by musical games indoors and a lovely supper, with sandwiches and iced cake and fruit drinks and ice-cream. Then Fred and Pete escorted Marjorie and Minnie to the 'teen-age' dance in town. Fred told me afterwards that they did not dance because it was 'a different sort of dancing,' but everyone talked to them and 'they sure had lovely music.'

On Saturday morning three of the teaching staff came with their cars to take us out to the airport. This was not a passenger airport, but had been taken over from the military and was being used as a base from which the planes went out to spray swamps with D.D.T. to kill the mosquito larvæ. Here we saw six or seven planes on the ground: most of them were one-engined. One pilot was loading up with D.D.T. He explained his instruments to the children, and they watched him take off. After this we were driven on to a village called Tranquille and shown over the lovely grounds of the T.B. Sanatorium. It did not occur to me to explain to the children that the people reclining on the lawns were patients, but I found from Edgar's composition afterwards that he was worried because 'there were signs saying KEEP OFF THE GRASS, but people were sitting all over the grass.'

After dinner we gathered at the Canadian Pacific Railway Station in Kamloops to wait for the train to Ashcroft, where the taxis would meet us. I had arranged this so that the children would have some idea of what travelling on a train was like. All the hostesses, and some of their parents, came to see us off, loaded with gifts of cookies and cakes and candy for the journey. The lady in

whose house Dick had stayed sent me a note to say that it was a long time since she had met such a well-behaved and nicely-mannered child, and hoping that if ever he could come to Kamloops again he would stay with them. As the train pulled out there was much waving of hands and repeated calls of 'Come, again next year!'

We had a pleasant drive to Clinton, where another surprise awaited us. The Parent-Teacher Association of the Clinton School had prepared a lovely supper for us. Some of the children had eaten so much on the journey that they could not do full justice to it, but it was a delicious meal.

On Monday morning the children demanded that they should write compositions all day, since they could never write all they had to say in one hour. In the afternoon they had another idea: they had been fascinated by the swimming and diving at Kamloops, and when we were discussing this Pete said, "We could make a swimming-pool in the creek!"

My instinct was to say, "Oh, no! Indeed you couldn't!", but I had come to have such respect for their capabilities that I merely said, "Could you?" and we went down to the creek to select a suitable spot. We found a shallower part in between two sets of little rapids, and Pete, Fred, Douglas and Michael, working like beavers, dammed this to make a delightful pool under the canopy of the cottonwood trees. Fred cut down a well-branched tree to fall across the water, and into the branches they wove old planks which were lying around, and stumps from the woodpile, and pliable branches of willow. They must have learnt how to do it when making fish-dams with their

parents. The pool was not deep enough for real swimming, but at least they could learn to be at ease with the water.

Now that spring had come, I was not so much cut off from human society. I could walk up the valley on Sunday afternoons and visit the children's homes, or call for a chat with Mrs. Dinger. I had to keep to the road because the mountainside was patched with little cushions of prickly-pear cactus, full of the most penetrating needles. If you accidentally brushed against the cushions a bunch of them would break off and hang from your foot; the needles were barbed and painful to extract. The cactus flowers, however, were very pretty—waxy, primrose-coloured blooms that looked like miniature water lilies—and I would put on thick leather gloves and go out to gather a bowlful to decorate my kitchen table. I had been disappointed to find that one could not go out in sandals because of the cactus nor could the children play football.

On Friday afternoons, when the children had gone home, I used to amuse myself down by the creek: I found it as fascinating as did the children themselves. I would hunt grasshoppers under the stones on my way down, or cut a juicy bit off my joint of meat if it was not yet cooked, and with an improvised rod I would fish for my supper or my next morning's breakfast. At first I could catch the trout, but I could not keep them. I did not know how to kill a cold-blooded fish, and I would put them on the bank far enough from the water. But no sooner was my back turned than the fish would give a spasmodic series of

leaps and plop back into the creek. Douglas told me how to knock them sharply on a branch. The fish I caught were rainbow trout—very small, but very good to eat. I did not see one more than eleven inches long taken out of the creek, and mine were generally eight or nine inches.

There were now more exciting incidents to report in the nature diary:

‘Last night we were eating supper and we heard a coyote holler. We ran out to the door and Ralph got the gun. Jack shot towards the hill. Patsy had a fight with the coyote and the coyote was choking.’ (*Floyd.*)

‘I was riding down the road and I saw a red deer. I stopped and hollered to him. He ran down to Bill’s fence, and that was the last of him.’ (*Douglas.*)

‘Yesterday Dad and Alfie went to brand cattle, and on the way back Alfie caught a magpie for me. Early this morning I caught some grasshoppers for him. I am going to keep him and catch some crows, and take him and sell him for \$2. Once I read a story of a tame crow, and so I am going to tame a magpie. We have got him in a box. He makes a noise when you go up to him.’ (*Ralph.*)

‘I went down to the spring looking for horses, with Bowser trotting way ahead of me. Bill said his dog had chased the horses up the road. There was nothing to do but go back. I passed the strawberry patch; I went up towards the flat; I was walking on one side of the gulch when Bowser’s hair stood up on his back and he growled. On the other side of the gulch I saw a big

brown bear looking at me. Sitting down, he was as high as I am his black nose was pointed at me and he had great paws that could smash me flat Bowser wanted to chase the bear he ran after it and bit its heels. The bear slapped at Bowser, but it missed. It ran down across the creek and up the other side of the flat I got Buck who was snorting at the foot of the flat, and I rode home to tell Mom' (*Mufal*)

The last month of this first year went very quickly. There was much activity in the valley now the cowboys brought streams of horses down the mountainsides, and they trotted past the school with manes dancing and feathered tails flowing blacks and sorrels and greys and roans, pintos and palominos and buckskins, mares, followed by their lovely, long legged colts and gleaming stallions, tossing and snorting as they went After school I would go down to Henry's place to watch the boys trying them out Some of them might have been running the range for two or three seasons without getting caught, and would be really wild One young when I arrived Young Alfie had just taken a toss and was hesitating about approaching a handsome palomar He invited Jack to take the first chance. Jack approached the palomino gradually, calming it when it bucked nervously, and with a quick, smooth movement he threw the rope round its neck and had leapt from the ground straight on to its back. He gentled it for a while and then ventured out of the corral and up the road, Young Alfie leading the way on a saddle horse.

On the last day the children asked, "Are you quitting

at the end of the term?" (The teacher at this school did not usually last more than a year.)

I answered, "Maybe I'm waiting to see if anyone says, 'We would like you to come back next year.' "

"Heck! *We* don't care!" said the boys, but Minnie spoke up quietly from the back of the room: "We should like you to come back, Miss Taylor!"

I had every hope of coming back. There was much to be done, and I wanted to enjoy again the succession of the seasons in this lovely valley. My little garden was now prospering. In the fall, when we had finally uprooted the tumbleweed, I had found that a good depth of earth was banked around the cabin, and had naturally assumed that this was for the purpose of making a garden. (Actually it was intended as a protection against the cold.) I had carried a few pailfuls of dried manure over from the barn and dug it well in. The bed in front of the house was now gay with nasturtiums, with asters and snapdragons to follow, and on the sunny bank behind were rows of beet-root and potatoes, and five ripening marrows. Ralph had said to me one day: "You're the first teacher in this valley who has had any ideas." This was a very gratifying remark, especially from Ralph, but I was surprised to find that his commendation was for my efforts at gardening. If someone could be persuaded to attend to the watering, I could look forward to enjoying the fruits of my labour when I returned to the valley in September.

## *Chapter VIII*

### BESIDE THE STILL WATERS

I SPENT the summer vacation in Vancouver, and in spite of the delights of beach picnics and mountain rambles I looked forward every day to my return to the valley. This time I found my own way there, and when the taxi deposited me at the cabin there was no riot of tumbleweed round the door, but a flame of colour behind the wire netting. Inside, alas! the same old enemies had been at work: the pack-rats had left their characteristic odour behind them and the mice had made nests, and obviously raised families, among my sweaters in the chest-of-drawers. I had to empty all the drawers and scrub them with disinfectant before I could begin to unpack my bags, and it was only after repeated washings that the clothing lost the smell of the mice. I had several meals from my potatoes and beetroot, and I made jam from the green tomatoes and the marrows, and enjoyed the colour round my door. But six days after the beginning of the term we had the first frost and the gardens were blasted in a night.

In school we spent the first day waging war on the rats—scrubbing to get rid of the smell. Nothing had been done to the premises in the way of cleaning or decorating, and the cupboard still had no back wall. Our efforts were no more than an inconvenience to the pack-rats: they had plenty of refuge under the floor-boards and between the logs in the roof. I had brought back with me some pieces of embroidery and they all, even the boys, elected to embroider a



gay square to make a nursery cot-cover for the hospital. We kept the squares in a cardboard box on my desk. One morning I noticed that the lid was askew on the box, but it was not until the afternoon, when we came to the lesson, that we found the pieces missing. I rounded on Michael, who was always up to tricks, but he said indignantly that he had not touched the box. Then Douglas noticed a trail of dirt leading from my desk, and followed it to the wall blackboard. He prised the blackboard away from the logs and retrieved piece after piece of embroidery, now riddled with gnawed holes, from the chinks. Some of the pieces were right up in the roof. Under the blackboard there was a loose plank in the floor. I found that the space beneath it was the repository for an unexpected assortment of objects: I never knew how many had been carried by the rats and how many had been 'cached' by Douglas, who sat near it. Michael had his cache on the other side of the room. The children had a trick of reserving for themselves the best pair of scissors, for instance, and hiding it in some secret place. Then, of course, they were liable to forget all about it and if they were absent from school the rest of us had to waste time hunting for it. Their big brothers did the same sort of thing with the tools on the ranch, to the exasperation of the ranchers.

There was now an exciting new feature of valley life. The Canadian Federal Government, at Ottawa, had begun to concern itself very commendably with the cultural amenities of the rural areas, and the previous June I had received a visit from a gentleman who gave me a long harangue about the role of the school as a community centre. I pointed out to him that I had been

brought up in an educational tradition where for nearly a century the rural school, being generally a Church school, had been the centre of community life. He then told me that the National Film Board of Canada would make available to the people of the district a number of movie films, which would make a circuit of rural schools. The complete equipment necessary for the projection of the films—at the cost of about \$3,000— would be brought down the valley on the Stage Truck for the performance once every five weeks. The only cost to the inhabitants would be that of freight charges, in sending the equipment on to the next school. It would be necessary also for the locality to provide the projectionist for the occasion: this duty was undertaken by the School Trustee. The films shown at our first performance were documentaries of a high standard: the first one showed the herding of the sheep from Kamloops which are brought to our ranges to pasture in the spring and taken back again in the autumn, an experience which the children could thoroughly appreciate. This was followed, in the same programme, by a film showing the herding of reindeer by the Lapps, and it made me feel that the Iapp were first cousins to these people. I felt that this travelling cinema was a very far-sighted project, giving these isolated children wider horizons in their conception of life.

The School Board had also provided the school with a battery radio set, with gramophone attachment. Unfortunately, radio reception was very bad in the valley during the day and we could only get programmes relayed from Kamloops, but the gramophone would be useful both in school and at dances. I thought to myself, 'Now I

shall be able to teach musical appreciation!' When I was ordering gramophone records I asked the children for suggestions. They said merely, "We don't want old women who screech!" I had thought of buying sea shanties and folk-songs, but they demanded cowboy songs, and it occurred to me that these were, of course, their own folk-songs. In their opinion, the greatest musical genius was Stephen Foster (who wrote 'Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair'), and one of Jack's arguments in support of drinking whisky was that Stephen Foster had composed his best work when he was drunk.

I bought a selection of cowboy records and the children would put them on in the afternoons when they were doing recreative work, so that my recollections of the autumn afternoons is of the children modelling their little animals to the strains of 'Tumbling Tumbleweed' or 'The Everlasting Hills of Oklahoma.' I also bought two Bible story records, in which the story was narrated with accompanying effects. Their favourite was the story of David and Goliath; they waited eagerly for the 'ping' of the sling shot and as it registered I could see every boy projecting himself into the role of David.

The first news I had heard when I came back after the summer vacation was that Minnie Dunn—Michael's mother—had been taken away to hospital with undulant fever. This left the Higginbottom family without a woman to look after them; the boys would have to prepare their own lunch-boxes before leaving for school each morning, and Alfie would have to cope as best he could with the inside as well as the outside chores.

The following Sunday afternoon I went visiting. This

was the time of year when I could enjoy the long walk up the mountain road to Mrs. Dinger's. She was my nearest white neighbour and lived with her husband and her mother in a charming Bavarian-style house about four miles up the valley. The children told me one day that Mr. Dinger was a Mormon, and for a time I supposed that he practised polygamy, as they said he had two women-folk! His ranch was always beautifully neat and his animals well cared for, and I liked to talk to Mrs. Dinger because she seemed to be really fond of the Indian children.

On my way back I left the road and went up the trail to Alfie's ranch to enquire about Minnie Duran. The house was a one-storied log cabin with several rooms, and with a veranda overlooking the valley. In this family, besides Alfie and Minnie and the five boys attending school, there were two youths—Cecil (Alfie's son), and Norman (Minnie's son by a different father from Michael's)—a little girl of Alfie's named 'Iootsic' who was seven years old, and a three-year-old named Ellen. So with all these mouths to feed Alfie needed to be a good hunter, not only to provide them with deer meat to eat, but in order to obtain commissions as guide to the American and Canadian hunters who came to stay at Jesmond. This was a well-paid job, which gave the native people the wherewithal to buy store clothing and groceries.

Alfie was not only a good hunter, but also a competent household manager. He showed me with pride the 'root-cellar' full of preserved peaches (from the Okanagan Valley, where Pete had been working during the summer) and other fruit, and jars of salted salmon, and dry fish, all prepared by himself. The children would certainly

not go hungry. Alfie and Annie Grinder (Henry's wife) were stepbrother and sister, and Alfie claimed that his father had been English. Neither he nor Annie had had any education, but Alfie could write and reckon, and he had one or two party tricks. He loved to stand on his head on a chair.

Annie had told me her story one day. She said when she was about twelve years old the Sisters fetched her away from her home because her father was having sexual relations with her elder sister. Her mother's people allowed her to be taken away, as they understood she was being sent to school in Vancouver. Annie did indeed travel to Vancouver, and began to work in a boys' residential school there. During the first week she received lessons in the afternoon from one of the Fathers. Then the lessons lapsed, but she remained to help with the domestic chores—well-housed and well-fed, and safe from the dangers which her home life might have presented. After a number of years her relatives demanded her return, and with the accumulated wages of \$25 she came back and married Henry.

Henry, a tall, lean, handsome Indian type, always avoided my society. Particularly he seemed to resent my camera. I never got to know him properly, though after a time he would wave to me from the road above as he drove the hay-wagon or the sled on his way to 'Grandma Grinder's.' His mother lived up near Mrs. Dinger's: she was of German stock and was very hospitable. She kept a barrel of home-made *sauerkraut* in her kitchen.

Later on in the term I asked the boys how Alfie was getting on with his housekeeping, and they told me that Anna was looking after them. I rejoiced to hear this,

because Anna was Alfie's wife, and I had felt for some time that the boys were missing their mother's influence. I had never met Anna, and only knew that she had left the home a year or two previously after a disastrous quarrel.

So I went again on a Sunday afternoon to call on the Higginbottoms. When I arrived I found so many people about that it took me some time to sort things out. Minnie was home from the hospital with her new baby: she was in bed and I did not see her, but the pretty cot could be seen through the half-open door. In the main room Anna sat at a treadle sewing-machine, stitching madly, surrounded by piles of jeans and shirts and underpants. Her own new baby was in a pram in the room, and she got up and attended to it from time to time, or went into the bedroom in response to Minnie's call or to soothe Minnie's baby. The boys drifted in and out to cross-question me about the topics that happened to be occupying their attention. Little Ellen, whom I now saw for the first time, came running into the room and, resting her elbows confidently on my lap, she looked up into my face and said, "Hello, Grandma!" Everybody laughed, and when I had rallied, I searched in my pockets for the bag of sweeties which every self-respecting grandma carries around with her. On my walk home I pondered on the situation in which an expelled wife returned to her husband's home to minister to her successor: I decided she must be either a saint or a simpleton. But I learnt later that Alfie was paying her \$60 a month to be his housekeeper.

Old Johnny and Melanie lived at the other end of the valley. Melanie—fat, squat and Indian-looking—had a warm and welcoming nature, and I never felt a stranger in

her house. Perhaps this was because she treated me as an equal, whereas the others had symptoms of an inferiority complex. Melanie's home was gay with potted geraniums, and though the beds in the four corners of the big room were tumbled and grey-looking, the family laundry was strung across the room, crisply starched and ironed. Melanie, too, had the shelves in her root-cellar loaded, and her 'tea-biscuits'—great big scones hot from the oven and dripping with butter—positively melted in the mouth. Her sons all had a healthy respect for her anger, even Little Johnny, whose ruin was whisky. Little Johnny had been to England as a soldier in the recent war. He for a time was stationed in the camp at Aldershot. I said to him, "You must have been terribly homesick!" and he told me that when he was lonesome he used to go into the fields by himself and snare the little rabbits to play with.

Twice a year great flocks of sheep were driven through the valley on their way to or from green pastures on the other side of the Fraser River. They came from Kamloops, and the sheep-herders must have had a difficult job protecting their herds from the depredations of covetous humans as well as of wild beasts. After the sheep had passed through the valley, most families were richer by a lamb or two which they had 'rescued from the coyotes.' The herds came through the forests along the top of the range behind the school, and struck the road further down the valley, so that I had never seen them. I had been mystified, the previous September, when the children had said to me, "Would you like a lamb?"

"A lamb!" I said. "Yes. I should love to have one! Is

somebody going to give me a lamb?" and they had replied:

"We saw the herders last night and we said, 'Can the teacher have a lamb?' and they said, 'Sure! Go ahead! We're not looking!'"

"But do the lambs belong to the herders?" I had asked. "I don't want you to take other people's property!" and they had replied, "We can get you one!"

This year when Minnie and Arthur, whose home was nearer the river, came to school with the news that the sheep would cross by the ferry that day, I decided to go down and watch them. We closed school early that afternoon and I went home with the children who lived down the valley. It was too far for us to go all the way to the river, so we stayed in an alfalfa field—green and cool in the shadow of the mountain. By four o'clock most of the children had gone home, and I was about to leave when Melanie called from the house and pointed down the valley. A cloud of dust was rising into the golden sunlight, so we knew the sheep were on the way. Minnie and Arthur and I walked down to meet them: we heard the bleating of thousands of sheep and lambs and then, turning a bend, saw the narrow road between the mountainsides heaving with white, woolly backs. The herder, leaning on his staff like an Old Testament shepherd, was naked to the waist: for although it was the beginning of October the weather during the day was very hot.

We climbed the slopes a little way to see the extent of the flock: there were 2,500 animals, we were told. Then we hurried back to see that the flock did not enter the alfalfa field or break through the trees into the orchard. Where the valley widened, we watched the sheep spread



out and go cascading past like an endless torrent, raising a dust as thick as a London fog; crushing the sage till the scent of it drenched the air. Arthur had left the barn door invitingly open, but the herders were vigilant: one of them took up a point of vantage overlooking all the buildings, and after the last sheep had passed he deliberately went into the barn and searched it.

Following the sheep came the pack-horses carrying the herders' supplies—three patient little animals roped together and one lordly mule who walked where he chose, seizing a mouthful of hay where he could, and poking his nose into everything. He had a look in his eye like that of a naughty schoolboy. The packs were covered with natural velvety brown-and-white cowhide. They hung out from the sides of the animal and were subject to very heavy wear, being crushed against rocks and trees.

I had supper at Melanie's and on my way home I overtook the flock again. The herders had camped and I could hear the bleating all around, but I could not distinguish sheep from sage bushes on the mountainside. In the gathering dark the rising moon was a silver sickle. I did not linger on the way, as I knew there would be wild beasts circling the flock.

One Saturday morning in October, when it seemed that to ride over Big Bar Mountain must be the most delightful thing in the world to do, I borrowed Marjorie's mare to ride the fourteen miles to the O.K. Ranch. I had received a very welcome invitation from Mrs. Marriott to ride over some time and spend a week-end with them, and as I had no means of contacting them I had to hope this would be a

convenient occasion. I could not have chosen a more perfect October day: the golden cottonwood trees, and here and there a scarlet maple, were brilliant against the dark-green of the pine-forested mountain walls. Squirrels scolded me from the lower branches of the pine trees, chipmunks scampered along the fence rails, and by the roadside at the top of the mountain I saw an ermine—a pure white weasel with a black tip to his tail.

Annie had lent me her saddle, but it was too wide for me and the chafing against my thighs punished me. The horse was very slow; she simply would not lope, and trotting was really painful, so it took us a long time. After a very steep climb, we came to a most inviting-looking trail leading to a gate into a recently-mown hayfield, and in the hope that this might prove a short cut I turned Priscilla towards it. Gates in cowboy country have a high rail to prevent the horses from jumping over; the horse knew just what to do to enable me to open the gate without dismounting. She edged up to it, broadside on, until her nose was level with the catch, waited while I leaned over and unhooked it, backed, and then walked through, then edged up again and pushed the gate into place. We found ourselves in a field surrounded by forest, and Priscilla suddenly woke up and loped across the soft, green grass. We were just in time to see a young deer—a buck—go bounding into the woods on the far side of the field. When we came to another gate I felt we were on the wrong trail and we went back and followed the road again.

I went on and on with not the slightest hope of meeting anyone from whom I could ask the way. We passed one or

two uninhabited cabins and an old building that had been a school: I looked through the broken windows and saw old school-books lying on the floor. At last, just when I was beginning to feel that I could not endure the torture of the chafing saddle a moment longer, the horse surprised me by leaving the road deliberately, and we were soon coming out from the trees to see the ranch buildings spread out below us.

I dismounted and flexed my bowed legs awhile before tying Priscilla to the gate post. Then I went into the ranch house. There appeared to be no one about. Mrs. Marriott had said that in this event I was to go inside and help myself, and as it was now mid-afternoon and I had eaten nothing since an early breakfast, I followed her instructions. When Mr. Marriott came in from his work on the ranch he was surprised to see me. His wife had gone over to Big Bar Lake, where she had a guest ranch for summer visitors, to stay for the week-end and close the place up, and Ronald, their son, was in Ashcroft. Mr. Marriott had lived in the district for many years and could tell me interesting stories of pioneering days in the valley, when the grandparents of my present pupils had been young and prosperous and open-hearted. A neighbouring rancher and his wife came to supper and we spent a very pleasant evening.

The next day I went out to explore by myself. The creek up here was wide and placid, and Herefordshire cows dotted the fields. A 'dog' came running down the slope and across my path—a sort of Alsatian it seemed, with its tail well tucked between its legs. I asked Mr. Marriott later whose dog it might be, and he told me it would be no dog, but a pestilential coyote, and that I should have

taken a gun with me. I left early that afternoon, in anticipation of an uncomfortable ride, and I was very sore by the time I reached home.

I had an idea that this visit of mine would not pass without comment from the children. The catechism began in quite a casual way.

"Heard you were up at the O.J.L. Ranch on Saturday," said Douglas.

"Did you?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Were you?" asked Ralph.

"I was."

"Did they ask you to go?"

"Mrs. Marriott wrote and invited me to ride over some week-end."

"Was Mrs. Marriott at home?" asked Michael.

"No. She was at Big Bay Lake."

"Was Ron at home?"

"No."

"Where was he?" asked Floyd.

"I don't know."

"Was Harry at home?" (i.e. Mr. Marriott).

"Yes."

"Anybody else there?" asked Douglas.

"Yes. We had visitors for supper."

"Did they stay the night?"

"No."

"Did *you* stay the night?"

"Yes."

There was a pause. I could, of course, have terminated the conversation long before this, but I felt that my

answers might be important to these children. If I snubbed them they would cease to cross-question me, but the problem would not be solved in their own minds. At last came the final question:

"Did you sleep upstairs?" (i.e. in a room to myself).

"I certainly did," I replied, and I talked to them for a few minutes about the ways in which human beings can enjoy each other's society while respecting the rights of the husband or wife, who may be absent. I told them that to get to know another person's mind and spirit was as wonderful as getting to know his body, and that the power to do this was a gift bestowed on human beings and not on animals, so that if we exercised only our physical qualities we were not only wasting two-thirds of our personality, but were aligning ourselves entirely with the animal sphere. I said it was not always easy to respect other people's rights, but we could ask God for help.

"Ask God!" said Ralph. "Do you believe that trash?"

And I told him that the only way to learn to believe in God was by practising believing in him, just as the only way to learn to ride a horse was by practising riding it. It seemed to me that if I was not allowed to give these children instruction about Christianity I was denying them what was their heritage by virtue of having been born in a country which was confessedly Christian.

"You can't change them!" "No," I thought; "but they can change themselves if I can induce them to *want* to change!" The trip to Kamloops had been a start: the girls, at any rate, would be inspired to make their homes clean and pretty, like the homes they had visited. How can people change if their environment remains the same?

The pattern of life repeats itself indefinitely if there is no one to plant in the children the seed of a determination to live a better life than the life their parents had lived. The crudeness of my pupils' attitude to life expressed itself sometimes unexpectedly. I asked where one of the fathers was on one occasion and Floyd said, "I guess he's gone to get a woman!" This was a parrot-like remark obviously copied from the grown-ups, but it indicated the way of thinking.

When I was wishing to introduce the older ones to verse-making, we examined the rhyme schemes and metre arrangements of various poems in their readers. Then, as an exercise in original verse-making, I took a nursery rhyme as a pattern on which we could base a parody:

'There was a little girl  
 And she had a little curl,  
 Right in the middle of her forehead.  
 When she was good  
 \*She was very, very good,  
 And when she was bad she was horrid!'

We discussed the rhyme and the beat, and then I said, "Now let's see what we can do!"

Michael began at once:

"There was a little girl  
 And her name was Pearl . . ."

Everybody laughed. Pearl was the name of a glamorous Indian girl who had been cooking for the Higginbottoms while Minnie Dunn was ill.

"There was a little girl . . ."

said Michael again,

"And her name was Pearl,  
And she asked Ed. to go to bed with her."

I took him straight across to my house.

"Were you trying to be offensive?" I asked.

"No!" said Michael with wide eyes.

"Well, why did you say that?"

"You asked us to make a rhyme like the other one!"  
he replied.

Boys should be taught by a man, of course, if they are to develop the quality of manliness. But if of necessity a woman is put in charge of them she is privileged in the opportunity she has of introducing refinements into their behaviour—not such conventions as that of raising the hat, for instance (which derives from a medieval custom and would be quite out of place in a country where you need to wear not only a hat, but also ear-muffs to keep your head warm), but those courtesies which spring from a genuine consideration for the comfort of others before one's own: offering one's seat; carrying a parcel; standing aside to let others go through a door first. I talked to the children about courtesy and suggested that they should try to practise it. I sought the co-operation of our friends of the I.C.D.E. in Vancouver, and they wrote the children a letter emphasising the value of courtesy and pointing out that the good repute of a nation depends upon the little daily courtesies practised by each individual. Then they offered a prize to the boy or girl who proved to be the most consistently courteous person throughout the coming school year. On receiving my

report in June, they would send out a bicycle for the pupil who ranked first. For the next couple of weeks I was overwhelmed with applications to chop my wood and carry my water and catch fish for my supper, until I pointed out that it was not that I wanted them to do my chores, but that I hoped they would in all their association—at home; at school; among themselves—consider the other person before themselves.

There were other problems that needed to be tackled. I had been in the habit of sending a child over to my house to fetch a book which I might need in school, but since the summer holidays I had begun to wonder if I was putting temptation in their way: I had begun to miss little things from my shelves—a packet of cherries, a tin of sweetened condensed milk, a handful of cigarettes. Douglas often smelt strongly of tobacco and openly admitted smoking and chewing it, as well as taking snuff and drinking whisky. Cecil came to call on me one Saturday afternoon and asked me if I could lend Annie Grinder some flavouring for a cake. I had only got about a teaspoonful of vanilla flavouring left—the bottle having in some unaccountable way become almost empty—but I had some almond extract and a new bottle of lemon flavouring. Cecil paid me for the lemon flavouring and took it away with him. Half an hour later he was back with Floyd. They wanted more, saying that the bottle had dropped and smashed on a rock. However, I could not spare any more. On Monday, in school, I noticed a bulge under Floyd's shirt and asked what it was. He grinned and brought out the empty lemon-flavouring bottle. I learnt that flavouring was often drunk as a substitute for whisky.



One morning, having without thinking sent Douglas over to my nouse to fetch a book, I said to him when he came back:

"Have you anything in your pockets that you ought not to have, Douglas?"

"No!" said Douglas firmly.

"Then you won't mind turning them out," I said. "Put the things on my desk!"

He turned out his tróuser pockets to the linings, putting all his treasures on my desk. When he had finished, I said:

"Is that all?"

"Yes!" said Douglas.

"Well, what is *that*?" I asked, pointing to a bulge in his shirt pocket.

Douglas took a step backwards and glared at me.

"It's *snoos*!" he said loudly.

"What is snoos?" I enquired.

"Snuff!" said the children.

"Well, put it on the desk," I said.

"I won't!" said Douglas.

"You will!" I said firmly.

"I *won't*!" repeated Douglas, clenching his hands and his teeth. I told the rest of the school to take the ball up on the hillside and have a recess. Then I said quietly to Douglas:

"I asked you to put *that* tin on the desk."

"I won't!" said Douglas.

"Then I shall have to take it from you," I said. I took him by the wrist and Douglas fought fiercely; then just as I was about to take the box he thrust it down the front of his trousers. I said, "Very well, Douglas! Sit down."

By this time the windows were lined with peering faces. I rang the school bell and the children began to come in,

but as they came Douglas went out, leaping through the open window. I assumed that he had given the tin to one of the others. He came in again through the door, and when they were all sitting in their places I said:

"Douglas has refused to obey me. If the children will not obey the teacher, there is no point in having a teacher. The School Board spends a great deal of money to give you the chance of being educated. I shall have to write and tell them that in the case of Douglas it is being wasted." Then I turned to Douglas, and said, "Where is that tin of snuff?"

"It's in the bush!" said Douglas.

"Go and get it!" I said.

He was outside for a few minutes and then came back with the tin.

"Put it on the desk!" I said, and he did so. He had now obeyed my instructions and the incident was over. But I sent Edgar home to ask their father to come and see me. He arrived when I was having my dinner, having whizzed down the mountain on Pete's old bicycle without brakes. At first he was unco-operative, saying that he had nothing to do with his children's behaviour at school, but when the word 'snuff' was mentioned he sat up with interest.

"So that was what happened to my new tin of snuff!" he said. Then I realised why Douglas had defied me: he had been afraid that I should keep the tin of snuff and his dad would give him a licking. I was afraid he would get his licking after all, because the tin was empty after it had been retrieved from the bush. It did not occur to me until afterwards that he had probably emptied the contents into his pocket after he jumped through the window.

It seemed likely that there was some connection between the behaviour of some of the children and their problems at home. Any instruction that I might give would have to be to the whole group, boys and girls; young and old. I consulted the Department of Education and they sent me an excellent book, *Growing Up*, by Karl de Schweintz, which I read aloud as a successor to Paul Bunyan. It began with the arresting statement that each one of them had grown from a speck of life ten times smaller than a pin-point. As the book went on they became absorbingly interested, so much so that they forgot the pictures they were drawing, and hung on every word. They came out in turns to look at the diagrams which showed the growth of the embryo and the position of the baby in the mother's body. I could only hope that this detailed explanation might be of some help to them.

We had a holiday on Friday, November 11th, to celebrate Remembrance Day, and Mrs. Marriott sent Ron down with the truck to fetch me to the O.K. Ranch for the week-end. Mrs. Marriott and I went riding on the mountain the next morning: the weather was perfect—blue sky and green pines and snow-tipped peaks surrounded us, like the pictures on the coloured calendars. On Sunday afternoon, on horseback, I helped Mr. Marriott to drive some bulls to new pasture, and I felt quite a cowgirl.

I appreciated this hospitality very much: if the ranchers in my own valley had sometimes made social overtures to me, life would have been less lonely.

Christmas parcels began to arrive the first mail day in

December and I unpacked the cartons and piled up the presents in my house. This year, besides the presents from the I.O.D.E., there were gifts from the Parent-Teacher Association of the Queen Mary School in Vancouver, and from the girls of the Kamloops High School—not just one gift for each child, but a number of exciting-looking packages wrapped in red or green or blue tissue and tied with silver ribbons. Each package was labelled with the name of the child for whom it was intended, and the children would come over to my house on the thinnest of pretexts and ask to see the parcels, which they would pick up and shake gently, trying to guess what they contained. Besides the actual gifts there were huge boxes of clothing for distribution among all the families, and in the week before the party I was up until the small hours every night, sorting out the dresses and coats and pyjamas and underwear and labelling them for the recipients, making up packages of candies and nuts and oranges and parcelling little treasures for the younger children who did not yet attend school, as well as coping with the usual end-of-term duties, such as the setting and marking of examination papers and writing of reports.

We had a big tree in the school this year, festooned with silver 'icicles' and gleaming coloured balls and other decorations sent by the I.O.D.E. Our entertainment this time was to be a home-made play called *The Old Woman of Big Bar Creek*. For a backcloth we had painted a huge nursery rhyme shoe on the back of a wall map, and we hung this across the archway at the back of the room, leaving a space at each side for exits and entrances. When the play began the children were 'asleep' behind the shoe.

Marjorie came in, appropriately attired, and announced,

"I'm the Old Woman who lived in a shoe;  
I've got so many kids I don't know what to do.  
I'll tell you about them, and ask your advice,  
For I *should* like to know how to bring 'em up nice!"

She then recited a topical verse about each of the children.  
The one about Douglas began:

"Douglas annoys me more than enough:  
He smokes my tobacco and sniffs my snuff."

As she came to the end of her verses the children began to wake audibly, and then darted in and out from behind the shoe, pulling each other's hair and playing tricks and generally creating a riot. Suddenly the window at the other end of the room burst open and Santa Claus climbed in. He strode down the room towards the stage, and then I stood up in the audience and called out:

"Old Woman, we see that you spoke very truly!  
Your children indeed are a trifle unruly—  
But how to improve them I have an idea,  
Now that their friend, Santa Claus, is here."

He then suggested in verse that the children should each recite a nursery rhyme to Santa Claus and, if he thought they were good enough, he would give them a present. They all did this in fine style and then we gathered round Santa Claus and sang carols, to celebrate the real spirit of Christmas.

We had had an open autumn with no snow until December but there had been plenty of frost. Before the

frost came, the irrigation ditch had overflowed and flooded a level patch by the creek, and this was now ice several inches thick. On the mail day immediately before the party I received yet another case from the girls at Kamloops: this contained—joy of joys—pairs of ice-skates, complete with boots, which the girls and their friends had outgrown. I knew the children would be thrilled with these, so I took them over to school at once, and the next morning I watched to see what happened. Edgar was the first pupil to arrive; he was responsible for lighting the school fire. I saw him go into the school: in less than a minute he was out again, hobbling across to the teacherage at full speed, with a skate on one foot.

"Whose are the skates?" he asked.

"They are for the children who get to school first!" I replied. He flew back to school and a few minutes later I heard him calling at the top of his voice, "*Skates for the kids who get here first!*" There was a mad race between the children approaching the school from opposite directions. There were only ten pairs of skates among the twelve children.

As soon as they had strapped on the skates, they made for the patch of ice. They kept falling down, of course, but they were determined to get there. Some picked themselves up and others continued crawling on all fours. When I had washed up my breakfast dishes I followed them. Douglas could already take a couple of steps without crashing; Arthur did not try to take steps, but just coasted down the slope; Floyd spent most of his time on his hands and knees. I suggested that I should walk backwards in front of him while he held on to my hands, but as usual he scorned the offer.

They were busy on the ice all the morning, learning to skate by trial and error and making a very good job of it. From time to time someone would come in to school to get warm and pass on his skates to another. Meanwhile, the girls were helping me to decorate the tree and make the room look really like Christmas. I had hoped that this year we should have a convincing Santa Claus. The I.O.D.E. had sent a new costume and mask so that we need not resort to the use of safety-pins, and if only I could persuade one of the ranchers to act as Santa's 'stand-in' we could have thrilled the children. I needed someone with enough initiative to keep up an appropriate 'patter.' There was a rancher living on an Indian Reserve some miles away: he was himself part Indian and so I assumed that he would have a special interest in my children. He had recently married a young girl who had been teaching in the district. I met them a few days before Christmas and I said to his wife, "You will be able to give a party for the little Indian children." The rancher said at once:

"Certainly not! You can't be familiar with those people!"

"I was taken aback. I said, 'But the children . . . ?'"

He repeated, "You can't be familiar with them."

I did not manage to persuade any of the ranchers to play Santa Claus, so I had to fall back on the young fellows of the valley. In the end I asked Jack, who played the part well—if a little bashfully. The children said afterwards, "Gee! Santa Claus was 'poor'!" (i.e. 'slim'. They say the horses are 'poor' when they come down the mountain after the near-starvation of the winter).

After the carol-singing on the night of the party, everyone sat down and the huge boxes of presents were carried in. Santa had in his bag an offering for everyone in the room, in the form of a packet of candies. Then the labelled gifts were handed out—armsful of them—and for an hour or so there was no room to move for fear of treading on toy motor-cars or engines or waddling ducks or louncing balls. Viva had three beautiful dolls, and even Marjorie had a doll, dressed in evening gown and cloak. There were surprises for me too: Grandma Grinder had made me a lovely Christmas cake, the Kamloops girls sent a pair of bedroom slippers, the Queen Mary B.T.A. gave me a book, and the ladies of the I.O.D.E. sent a rosy, wooden apple-for-the-teacher, containing sewing kit.

I also had a surprise for the grown-ups. For some time I had been turning over in my mind the question of drunkenness and I wanted the people to appreciate the fact that it was not the mere drinking of alcohol which I condemned, but *excessive* drinking. It appeared that the native population had no experience of moderate drinking: the white man was in those surroundings as intemperate as the Indian. There was a law in most Canadian provinces which denied access to liquor to the Indian. Presumably the white man had made the law in the interests of the native, but how had it come about that he had developed no sense of responsibility whatever for his own example in the matter? Nobody could see the logic of this question when I asked it. Another Canadian law which defeats its own aim is that forbidding the sale of liquor in a dance hall. As there may not be a 'bar' for the sale of liquor in small quantities, the dancers bring whole



bottles of whisky with them, (and they withdraw from the dance hall from time to time to sit in the car (or the hay-loft!) and empty the bottles.

Someone had sent me a packet of lemonade crystals, and I decided to make 'cocktails' for the party night. I wrote to the liquor store at Ashcroft for two bottles of gin, which came down on the open Stage Truck the next week, and did not escape the observant eyes of my pupils. However, the youths who visited me hopefully for the next few evenings were disappointed.

Early the next Sunday morning the Clinton taxi came skimming down the mountain road and stopped above the school. Seeing two men get out of it and take to the trail, I swept the crumbs off my breakfast table and refilled the kettle. A few minutes later the driver was introducing to me the new police constable who had recently come to live in Clinton and was making his first visit to the valley. The two men regaled themselves on coffee and bread and butter and marmalade, and then I took them across to school to see the tree and the Christmas decorations. I could now ask advice about my plan for handing round 'cocktails' at the party, but I must have expressed myself badly, because the constable interrupted me with a very stern expression.

"Are you selling liquor to the Indians, madam?" he asked severely. The taxi-driver threw back his head with a guffaw and I said, "I certainly am not!" I explained my purpose, and the constable said that the only occasion when it was legal to have alcohol at a dance was when it was a private party to which the guests were *invited*. So on Monday morning I hastened to impose on

the children another exercise on writing invitations.

On the party night I went over to my house after the distribution of presents and came back carrying a big trayful of glasses of lemonade (the 'glasses' were waxed-paper beakers), each with a cherry floating on top and generously laced with gin. The children, of course, thought the treat was for them and there were exclamations of disappointment when I said, "Grown-ups only!" After the first sip eyebrows were raised and dark eyes flickered, but no one made an audible comment. Grandma Grinder, who, I was told later, was a teetotaller, drained her glass without any discernible suspicion of what it contained.

When the children could be persuaded to tear themselves away from the toys, and the refreshments and coffee had had time to settle, we were ready to dance. I was now familiar with the pattern of dances in the valley and expected to stay up late. Around midnight a stranger joined the party, a cowboy (white man) whom I had not met before. The children brought him and introduced him as 'Ben,' and he asked me to be his partner in the next square dance. He sat beside me between the dances and I found his conversation very pleasant and entertaining. The children said to each other with apparent satisfaction, "Teacher's got a boy-friend!"

The revellers were always ready to dance until breakfast-time, but I could not keep up that pace, and so about 3 a.m. I asked the M.C. to announce the last waltz. Ben suggested that he should come over to my house for coffee after the dancers had gone home, before riding

down to his lonely cabin on the ranch. I agreed, on the condition that I did not have to make fresh coffee. So we took the pail off the school heater: I locked up the school and we went over to my cabin. Lila was there, putting on her warm outer garments. She and Joe now lived in their cabin on top of the mountain and she would have a long, cold ride.

The next morning I awoke early to the sounds of unaccustomed activity outside my house. It was half-past seven. I looked through the window and saw a wagon and team standing at the school door, so, supposing that one of the previous night's visitors had left something in school and was waiting for the key, I dressed quickly and went over to open the door. But I was wrong. Ralph and Floyd were there, and they said they had come to get some hay from the barn. I went back to prepare my breakfast. It seemed to take them a long time to load the hay: I was in and out of doors all the morning, fetching water and hanging out my laundry, but still the wagon stood at the barn. Then at last it lumbered off. The next time I went outside my eye was caught by some little red specks moving about on the mountainside across the valley. I got out my binoculars and found that some of the children, in their red shirts, were playing up there. They were still there at three o'clock in the afternoon—and I suddenly realised that my house was being kept under observation. These incorrigible children were waiting to see Ben come out of it.

## *Chapter IX*

### DEEP FREEZE

A LITTLE snow fell in Big Bar Creek before Christmas, but there was no difficulty in getting out of the valley. I went to Vancouver again for the holiday and was there over the New Year. After Christmas in Vancouver the weather was unusually severe: trans-continental trains were as much as two days late. Buses were lost all night, and cars were buried in snowdrifts. We heard on the radio that there were low temperatures and several feet of snow in the Cariboo district, so I started back to school a day earlier than I should have done otherwise.

I reached Ashcroft that night and went on to Clinton in the doctor's car the next afternoon. A blizzard was raging and driving was difficult. At Clinton the temperature was 50° below zero (Fahrenheit). I learnt that the road to Big Bar Creek had been impassable for a week, but that the snow-plough had been through that day to open it up for the Stage Truck tomorrow. I hurried off to the office to book a seat on the truck; there were so many passengers that the truck would not accommodate them all, so a taxi was laid on for the overflow. I rode in the car, which went ahead of the truck. It was a lovely ride to Jesmond; the car was warm and comfortable and under the dazzling snow the views were even more beautiful than usual.

The Mountain House had been for the past couple of weeks a haven of refuge, like a monastery in the Swiss

Alps, and the Coldwells had spent their time stoking fires and dispensing hot meals to succour the half-frozen travellers who were stranded there. I stayed long enough to collect my mail, and then the driver took me on the ten or eleven miles down to the school. When we arrived he could not turn the car off the road because of the depth of snow, so we set out to carry the parcels down to the cabin. I floundered thigh-deep through the snow, with a ten-weeks-old puppy wrapped up in a blanket in my arms. The driver followed with the parcels. When I had managed to open the door, and had deposited the puppy and the parcels in the chill, dark cabin I turned to the driver and said, "I'll come and help you with the baggage."

"What baggage?" he asked, and I discovered to my dismay that all my groceries had been stowed in the Stage Truck and would not be coming down from Jesmond until the next morning. I returned thanks that I had left plenty of food in the cabin before the holidays.

I set to work making the place habitable. The temperature even inside the cabin was below zero—how far below I did not know, because the indoor thermometer did not register beyond zero. There was enough wood on the pile inside the cabin to start the fire; then I dug some blocks out of the deep snow outside and began to chop them. Every piece I cut leapt into the snow and was buried, so it took a long time. I had to make two journeys to the creek, first to break trail and then to fetch the water. The ice was over a foot thick. I broke it with the axe and lowered my pail into the creek, but the water froze to the inside of the pail the moment it touched it, and by the time I got back to the cabin it was all solid ice. I put the pail on

the stove and then went to gather a kettle full of snow; the trek to the creek was too exhausting. But I found it takes quite a lot of snow to produce even enough water for a cup of tea.

I was surprised to hear a honk from the road; the taxi-driver had not yet moved off. I realised afterwards that he was expecting me to return to the town, but it never occurred to me to do so. The cabin was warming up, so I nilled my lamps and turned to thoughts of supper. I then met disaster: all my vegetables had frozen to pulp, and the contents of tins were rock-solid. I made a sort of meal from thawed out pineapple juice and Grandma Grinder's Christmas cake. There was one thing to be thankful for: there was no need to worry about damp sheets. The air was always so dry that the 'airing' of mattresses and clothing which one has to do after an English holiday was unnecessary. I put the blankets to warm, however, and went to bed with a hot-water bottle—the first time I had used one since I came to Canada. I could not leave the puppy to freeze after the fire went out, so Taffy and I kept each other warm as well as we could. I got up three times in the night to put on more fuel, but the fire was out long before morning and when I awoke the mercury was again right at the bottom of the thermometer. I left the hot-water bottle (a rubber one) on the bed on top of the blankets: after breakfast, when I went to make the bed, the contents of the bottle were ice.

I breakfasted off cereal and milk, made from powder. Then, since it seemed my life would depend on wood, I began to struggle with the axe. About half-past eleven I heard the distant hum of the truck from Jesmond and I hurried to get to the road, but it took them a while to

unload all the packages, and I had plenty of time. When I saw the bags and boxes lying by the side of the road and contemplated the labour it would take to wade through the snow over and over again, I could not withhold my tears. The two lads in the back of the truck leapt out without a word and picked up the whole lot, and marched them down to the cabin for me.

It was impossible, of course, to open school. I realised that it would take me all day to complete the chores necessary to keep me alive—wood-chopping, water-carrying, lamp-filling—as well as attending to the fires and cooking my meals. The little Higginbottoms had pluckily made the journey down the mountain and seemed quite disappointed when I said school was closed. None of the other children ventured out. It began to dawn on me that if I stayed in the valley under these conditions I might perish, so with Taffy in my arms I hailed the returning truck that afternoon and the driver took me up to Jeannond.

I came to have an unbounded admiration for the skill and tenacity of the Stage- and taxi-drivers on the mountain roads, who see that the freight and passengers go through to their destinations no matter how difficult the conditions may be. It was bad enough to drive down the valley on a summer day, with its precipitous roads and spiralling gradients, but when snow covered a surface of solid ice, or in spring when the snow-water had washed areas out of the road surface, I thought sometimes that their efforts were superhuman. On one occasion I was coming out of the valley at Easter-time: the taxi was full and the hour was late. An Indian family were in the back

of the car and I was in front with the driver and his partner. The earth road was pitted with great mud-holes and puddles: the driver had to judge whether to go through them slowly and cautiously—in which case he would probably stick in the middle—or ‘step on the gas’ and perhaps rip the bottom out of his tank with a hidden rock. It was very difficult to gauge the depth of the puddles.

On this particular night we had come twenty or thirty miles without mishap. Then, as we bumped carefully through a long, gleaming mudhole, we stuck. It was pitch dark and drizzling with rain. The driver and his partner got out of the car, but advised us to stay where we were, as the mud was ankle deep. Then the two men worked with determination to free us: they knew they had no hope of any help from passing traffic within days and the nearest cabin was miles away. So they *had* to do it themselves. They began by taking a log out of the fence and using it to lever up the car: then Terry, the driver, crawled underneath and strewed spruce boughs to give the wheel something to bite on. The engine roared and the wheels spun, but we only dug ourselves deeper into the mud. They replaced the fence-rail and then, in the light from the headlamps, cut down a young tree and rammed this under the car. Using it as a lever they depressed the end of the tree so that the front of the car, with us in it, was lifted clean off the ground. Terry, who was not a young man, hung on to the end of this while Tom grovelled under the car with a spade and dug out the mud. At last, after two hours of exhausting effort, they succeeded, and we went on our way without further mishap.

This feat amazed me, but they regarded it as merely



part of the day's work. So it was with the drivers between Big Bar Creek and Jesmond. When the driver came to the long, steep, tortuous piece of road near the end of the journey, he knew that it was very unlikely that he could take it without a break. There were hairpin bends on steep inclines: when the truck stalled the driver would open the cab door and lean halfway out, with one hand on the steering-wheel. The truck would run backwards at an alarming speed straight for the rim of the precipice, and I would close my eyes and resign myself to my fate, but the driver knew just when to turn the wheel. Then he would begin again and the engine would roar and the wheels would spin a rut into the snow. If necessary, he would get out to strew sand or spruce boughs, and somehow they would get out of it. The mail truck might be late, but it always arrived.

When we arrived at Jesmond we heard that the Stage Truck was marooned at Gang Ranch and might be hours late, but I had a stroke of luck in that the police car was out here and would give me a lift in to Clinton. That night I was back again in the Clinton teacherage, among the family of the school Principal. The house was a bungalow with the rooms all opening on to a passage in the floor of which there was a grid called the 'register.' This grid was immediately over the oil furnace, and heat in the house was regulated by turning an indicator in the kitchen wall to the required temperature. The oil from the storage tank outside the house fed directly into the furnace. The windows were thickly coated inside with an undulating layer of ice where the moisture from our breathing froze

on coming into contact with the cold glass, but the rooms themselves were very warm.

From Clinton I rang up the Secretary of the School Board to explain my absence from school. Nick had resigned the previous summer and his successor had never been down the valley and did not know how difficult conditions were there. I was instructed to return to school next week with the School Trustee who would be returning to his ranch by truck.

On my way back to the valley the next week, Mr. Robertson told me that the School Board had ordered Alfie Higginbottom to make any necessary repairs to my cabin so that it would be warm and weatherproof. When we arrived I found Alfie and his boys working there: they had come down by horse-drawn sleigh and the horses were standing outside. Alfie had made a fire beside them in an empty oil-drum, to prevent them from freezing where they stood. He was busy inside the cabin, fixing up a heater stove in my bedroom. The heater had been there since before I arrived the previous year, but there was no chimney to it. Alfie now cut a hole in the roof and fixed the stove-pipe, then lined the ceiling round it with zinc so that the snow would not come in. While working in the roof he found chinks between the logs big enough to put your hand through, so he plugged these with newspaper. The boys meanwhile had been digging trails through the deep snow from the cabin to the wood-pile, the creek and the school. Finally, Alfie effected a vital repair to my can-opener, and fixed my bedroom window so that it would not blow out of its frame with the first strong blast from the north.

There had been low temperatures occasionally the

previous year, but they had never lasted for more than about thirty-six hours at a time. Now for two continuous weeks there had been this intense cold, and it was to be a long time before it ended. Daily I hoped to be able to open school, but the temperature on successive days was 20, 25, 35 and 40° below zero, according to the outdoor thermometer. My house was very warm when the fires were burning well, but it soon chilled when the wood burnt low. During the night Taffy would thrust a sudden cold nose into my face with a whimper when he felt the temperature drop, and I would get up and replenish the fuel in the heater. I spent the hours of daylight struggling to keep myself alive. Mountains of wood had to be chopped—and as I had now got near the end of the pile and down to the knotty wood, I found it very hard work. The water that I brought up from the creek remained thick with ice even though I stood the buckets under the stove. Nothing moved in the valley if I had had an accident with the axe I could have bled to death, but I never thought of this at the time. My only anxiety was lest the house should take fire. I had brought the cans of oil and gasoline inside the house now, since if they froze I should be in the dark. So I left the house door unlocked when I went to bed, in case I had to get out in a hurry.

I began to feel a desperate need to get back to Clinton, and on the next mail day I was relieved to have a note from the School Trustee authorising this. I spent the next three weeks in the comfort of the Clinton teacherage, justifying my existence by helping with the teaching there. For three more weeks the low temperature persisted, varying from 20° to 25° below zero. This sort of

weather was at least approved of by the ice-hockey players, enthusiasm was so great that spectators would stand round the outdoor rink for a couple of hours at a time when the temperature was not more than 20° below, keeping their feet warm by stamping on the wooden boards, and from time to time popping into the heated shack where coffee and hot-dogs were on sale.

Big Bar Creek School reopened after the Christmas vacation on February 9th, 1950. For a week or so the weather was glorious, the Chinook, or warm west wind, sending torrents of snow-water cascading down the mountainsides, and the sunlight gleaming on the snow. Since the cold weather the radio had ceased to function and I had no check on the time. Sometimes I misjudged this badly: I would prepare, eat, and wash-up after my breakfast, mop my kitchen floor, mark a set of books—and still the children would not have arrived. But more often I was just ready when I saw them coming. They were very punctual, but the little alarm clock in school began to be somewhat unreliable. It occurred to me that it was only in school hours that it worked erratically and after a little observation I discovered that the hands were being moved back about ten minutes at the beginning of the recess and forward at the end of it. So one day I kept the school behind for half an hour to make up for time lost, and that was a satisfactory deterrent.

Winter was not over, however; the snow and cold weather returned and the skates were still in use. Old Johnny's family had moved up to a house nearer the school, where old Bill had lived. Here they made a

skating rink on a frozen flooded patch by the creek and the skates had been in such demand by big brothers and fathers as well as by children that they were almost worn out. I was amazed at the progress the children had made; they streamed over the ice, circling and about-turning, crouching on their heels, forming figure-eights.

Lying by the roadside a little way up the valley, with her neck gracefully arched and her chestnut hide shining in the sunlight, was Minnie's little mare. She had 'slipped her colt' the day after Christmas and, lying there, had frozen to death. She looked beautiful, like a bronze statue, but when the thaw came Minnie's brothers hitched her behind the team and dragged her up the mountainside. For days we watched from below the eagles and ravens gathering from afar to strip the flesh from her bones. The first week in March we had snow again, it made everything look so clean and lovely that I could not regret it. The snow was fine and powdery, swept into whorls where the air currents had had free play, and the children loved to play in it. When clothing was covered with snow, you had only to shake it off. A broom was kept on the doorstep of every home, and before entering you were expected to brush the snow off your boots.

When the children first saw Taffy, they did not think much of him. He was a Welsh terrier, and they were not accustomed to such small dogs. They had no use for a dog that could not herd cattle or hunt cougar. But the dogs in the valley loved him, especially Spike, who would sleep on my doorstep all night for the chance of playing with Taffy in the morning. Spike was part collie and part

bloodhound. He could run like the wind, and he would fly down the trail to the creek and away into the underbrush, with Taffy after him; there he would squat in the snow until Taffy had gone streaking past, and then bounce up and chase him. The two of them would frisk down to the creek with me before breakfast and disappear, full of the joy of life. One morning Spike came back alone: in spite of my calling and whistling, Taffy did not reappear. Patches of the creek were open where the current was very swift, and I began a frantic search for Taffy. Above the bank of deep snow which overhung the near side of the stream I spotted a moving twig. There was no wind, so I climbed the slope behind me for a better view, and I saw below Taffy's little head bobbing up and down out of the creek and his front paws struggling to get a foothold on the ice. I rushed down and threw myself flat on the snow, praying that the ice underneath would hold: I could just reach him—and when he survived that ducking I decided that he could survive anything.

Spike's days were numbered, however. One thing against him was that, like Freckles, he was a 'coward.' Cecil tested this one night. My cougar skin had now arrived, mounted as a rug, with the wicked teeth shining from gaping jaws. One dark night Cecil draped himself in the rug and hid in my bedroom. The boys brought Spike into the cabin, and when the 'cougar' came growling from under my bedroom curtain Spike's terror was ludicrous. Another mark against him was due to the fact that he would not stay at home, but haunted my house. I refrained from feeding him, in the hope that he would go home, but he still wandered; so he was shot.

Taffy provided a new means of 'making the teacher git mad'—or so the children anticipated. One lunch-hour they were sitting round my step in the sunshine when Edgar said ostentatiously, "Come here, you son of a bitch!"

I went on hanging out my dish-cloth. After a moment Michael said:

"Hey! You're not supposed to let us use that word!"

"Which word?" I asked innocently.

"You know!" said Michael.

"Bitch!" said Ralph.

"Why not?" I asked.

"We're not supposed to say it," said Viva.

"Why not?" said I. "It's in the dictionary."

This had to be verified. Pete fetched a dictionary.

"Sure! It's in the dictionary!" said Pete.

"Is there anything wrong with using the words, 'sow' and 'marc'?" I asked. "Taffy is the son of a bitch. It is only when you apply that expression to a man that it becomes offensive—for the simple reason that you are insulting his mother."

We had a dance to celebrate St. Patrick's Day, of course. Our dances were always held on the Saturday night nearest to the festival, but this time we chose badly. Wet snow was falling. However, quite a crowd of people turned out. Around midnight Young Alfie and Pete went over to my house to make the coffee: they were away a long time. Later on, when I went over to my cabin, I was surprised to find Pete, Fred, Ralph and Douglas sitting round my stove. Pete's socks were drying on my oven door. I said:

"Well boys! I think you might have asked me before coming to sit in here!"

Fred said, "When we came in your little dog was at your cupboard there!"

I went to my meat-safe. The door, which usually swung to of its own accord, was wide open. The little joint of meat which I had cooked that day and which had to last me a week (until the next Stage day) was gone. I went into the bedroom and found Taffy chewing a large, bare bone. I spanked him. This caused so much mirth that another thought struck me: I went back to look at the safe and found that the door was propped open. So the theft had been staged, and was supposed to be a joke. The boys had eaten the meat themselves, most likely. I was very much upset, not primarily because I had lost my meat, but because they had played such a malicious trick on me. Although I regarded them as friends, they still considered me an outsider.

I sent the boys back to school, and I followed them and told the assembled company what had happened and how I felt about it, saying that I could no longer enjoy the party and should leave them to finish it by themselves. Big Dick was present to take charge; he was the only white man who was a regular attender at our dances. The party went on for another hour or so: I could hear the rhythm of the feet and see the shadow of the dancers crossing the patch of light thrown by the windows on the snow, and hear the laughter roused by the square dances -- but I felt very much depressed. It was on occasions like this that I was aware of my isolation: there was no one with whom I could discuss my perplexities.

It was not until some time afterwards that I realised that the youth who had been responsible for the stone throwing attack had been helping with the coffee-making in my cabin.



## *Chapter X*

### TOOTH AND CLAW

THE snow was with us until the middle of May that year, but when spring did come at last there was rapid growth. The mountain-slopes soon showed a film of green, and the undergrowth down by the creek was lush. Every morning when I opened my cabin door I was met with waves of perfume from the opening leaf-buds and sweet briar bushes. There were masses of wild flowers: to come across bushes festooned with the flowers of purple clematis, against the darker green of the fir trees, gave me a shock of pleasure.

One afternoon we had gone out for nature study to see how many wild flowers we could find. The children were scattered over a meadow at the foot of the slope when somebody looked up towards the top of the range and called out, "The horses are coming!" They all went running, flinging themselves to the ground behind the nearest rock or bush, while I stood with my mouth agape wondering what was causing the excitement. Ralph raised himself and shouted with emphatic gestures:

"Git down! Git down! You'll be killed!"

"The horses are coming!" yelled Michael. "Git down! They'll stampede!"

I looked upwards; and could just see the horses streaming over the top of the range followed by two tiny cowboy figures, silhouetted against the sky. They seemed far

enough away, but the children were insistent that I should efface myself, so I ran to the nearest rock. I lay there watching the cowboys (Little Johnny and his brother Henry, they turned out to be) coming down the sheer face of the mountain in a series of sideways leaps, like deer, little clouds of dust spurting up from their horses' heels. A few moments later the horses were thundering across our path, and I appreciated the necessity to 'git down.' Pressing behind them came Little Johnny and Henry, herding them towards a gap in the fence of another meadow. They had carefully removed the logs, which provided the fence rails, at one point to make an entrance, but many of the horses leapt the fence.

These seasonal activities of the valley were reproduced most successfully by the children in the drawings which they made in their spare minutes. Their success had amazed me from the outset. I did not attempt to 'instruct' them in any way. Indeed, I had not the ability to do this. My contribution consisted in building up their confidence in their own power to express what they felt, or to record what they had experienced. I never had to 'set a subject' for a picture: they always had so much to say. They had a natural sense of pattern and composition, and a natural understanding of perspective, in which they would set themselves the most difficult problems and solve them with ease. Perhaps this was due to the accuracy of their observation, and to the fact that their viewpoint was generally from above the scene. The typical convention—which I had met with in the drawings of English children—of leaving an empty space between the sky and the ground never occurred in their work, for the simple

reason that to them the sky always appeared to meet the ground along the top of the mountain range.

The nature diary was now full of descriptions, from every child in the school, of incidents they had experienced:

‘Last year we were haying up at the meadows’—said Floyd, ‘when Jack killed a snake and he hung it on the fence. Bill came, and he stroked his foot along her belly and she pawked up six little ones.’

I was not prepared to accept this: I knew that snakes laid eggs. But the other children corroborated Floyd’s story, and on consulting a reference book I found that the garter snake, which is common in the district, bears living young.

Dick wrote in June:

‘I saw an egg-shell on the road. I picked it up and gave it to Micky. It was a swallow’s and it was white.’

Douglas could now produce consecutive sentences to tell his stories:

‘I was haying in the field with Pete, and Dad and Peter told me to take his horse to the creek to water it. Just as I was getting on him my foot hit him in the flank and he started to buck. Dad shouted to me to jump off, but I stayed on him for a while, and then I jumped off

Arthur was interested in all the wild life in the valley:

'I saw a blue grouse yesterday and it flew away and lit beside the creek, and I saw a magpie and it is dead. It is frozen in the ice by a tree. The cow is dead and the magpies eat the dead cow and the dog chases the magpies away. The dog is stingy and he will fight anything.'

Viva wrote in April:

'The day before yesterday Dad and Little Henry and Little Johnny were breaking wild horses. I was watching them. First they caught the horse we put in the Stampede: they would not ride him because he bucks. Then they caught the iron-grey: he surely can buck. They had a rope round his neck, but he jumped up above the corral. My dad caught another grey; it was Minnie's horse. He bucks, too. The iron-grey tried to jump over the other corral but he did not succeed. He just balanced himself on the fence. They got "Home Brew" out and saddled him up and then pulled straws to see which one would ride him. Little Henry got the long straw the first three times. Then Jack came up and he pulled. Little Johnny got the straw, so he rode him. The horse did not buck.'

Minnie told of a trip up the mountain:

'We went up the mountain to pick hooshum to make drinks for the summer. We stayed at Grant Lee's place.

There were coyotes howling every night, and Eddie's dogs were barking all night long. Cecil slept out on the veranda. In the middle of the night he got cold and came into the house. In the morning we went picking hooshum: we saw where the bears had been breaking hooshum bushes and eating ant piles.'

Ralph described another adventure in the hayfield:

'When I was haying up' at the meadows, Alfie and I were patching the fence when we saw an eagle. He picked up Buster [the collie dog] and took him in the air about six feet. I ran to get the gun, but Alfie whistled by me like wind. The eagle lit on a tree and I looked at it. I heard a shot; Alfie was in front of the house shooting. Dad said, "Get the 25 35!" but I grabbed some .22 shells and we shot again. He was on a different tree: we ran over there, but he flew away.'

It was against the law for the schoolchildren to use guns, of course, but these children needed to know how to use them and they were as proficient with them as with the axe. Michael wrote:

'One day when the sun was just going down Mom said I could go hunting grouse. Pete and Edgar went up the side of the mountain and I went across the creek. I was about three-quarters up the mountain when I heard a she grouse hoot: I saw her run down through the trees. I ran up a ridge and saw it stop: I shot, but missed it.' The second time I shot I hit it and it rolled

down. I caught it and plucked it. As I was plucking I heard a hooter and went after it. I shot at it and missed; then it flew away.'

Pete told of his first visit to a Stampede:

'On Friday afternoon Fred and I went to Dog Creek to see a Stampede for the first time. We rode up to Canoe Creek the first night and we stayed with Talia: we had to sleep on the floor. Fred and I went on to Dog Creek the next day. They had bucking horses and bareback horses: the bucking horses bucked so much that one nearly threw itself over backwards. Bert Grinder was riding him. Stanley Alex was riding another bucking horse and he turned right over, and Stanley turned over slowly too. I was going to run my horse in the pony race, but he had wandered away, so Henry Grinder told me I could ride his baldy horse in the race, and I did, and I came in second. They had backward races and Arthur Rossett won first and second both: he went round the circle twice, and the others never went even once.'

Edgar wrote in May:

'Dad told Pete and me to go and get a team up at Noel's. We saddled the horses: I rode Chipmunk and Pete rode Clipper. When we were on our way Chipmunk went lame, so Pete put some shoes on him up at Dave's. On the other side of the old school house we saw seven deer. We were only about twenty feet from

them, but they did not seem scared of us: they just walked into the bushes. On the way to the O.K. Ranch we saw ducks and geese on the lakes.'

(May is one of the close season months, when hunting is not permitted. The animals seem to know when they are safe from the gun.)

Marjorie gave a descriptive account of how to strip hides:

'A few days ago I decided to strip some deer hides. I went up into the shed and got two hides—one big buck and a little one. I put them in a big tank, and every time we washed clothes we would put the soapy water in the tank. I left the hides in the soapy water for about four days. Jack made a frame for me to strip the hide on, and Melanie lent me a blade.

'You throw half of the hide over the pole on which you are stripping, and after you have finished stripping you soak the hide in soapy water and brains overnight. You squeeze this all through the hide, then wring it as dry as you can and put it on a frame and stretch it. You now punch it with a sharp rock on the end of a stick: punch it until it gets dry and soft, then take it off the frame and smoke it.

'Now it is buckskin and ready to be made into whatever you want it for.'

There was one entry in the nature diary, however, which was as thrilling as any magazine story—a casually-written account of an adventure with a cougar when the

boys concerned, having no weapon with which to defend themselves, improvised a snare with which to strangle her. We had had a holiday the previous day to celebrate the King's Birthday, and I asked the children if they would tell me of any adventure they had had on the holiday. Fred and Jack had set out on an errand to a cabin on the other side of the range, to deliver a sack of potatoes. They were each riding their own horse, and they had with them a little colt as a pack-horse, and an eight-months-old collie pup, Rover. They rode for some miles, then left the sack of potatoes at the fork in the trail and went on to Old Kitty Ann's cabin to spend the night. The next morning they rode back and collected the sack of potatoes, put it on the colt and set off

'We had gone down the trail about twenty yards,' says Fred, when Jack yelled, "Cougar!" I thought he was fooling me, but the first thing I knew a cougar jumped out of the sage.'

She was after the colt, of course. Apparently the idea of flight never entered the boys' heads. They hollered, and the cougar began to lope down the slope, so they set the puppy after her. Rover ran at full speed and headed her off. She backed into a sage bush and started growling, and Rover did not know how to tackle her.

'If the cougar had slapped Rover once,' says Fred, 'she would have killed him.'

So he called the dog back. Jack picked up a rock weighing



about three pounds and let fly, hitting her in the ribs. That just made her stagger down the hill. She took refuge in a juniper bush and Fred sent Rover out again. The dog jumped at the bush: the cougar snarled and Fred called Rover back.

By this time the boys were determined to take a trophy home, and collect the bounty. Fred hit his chaps with a rope and the cougar slid out of the bush and climbed a tree. They decided that a sling would give more impetus to the rocks, so Fred sat down and cut the tongue of leather out of his boot to make the bag of the sling, but still they could do no more than bruise her. Then Jack had an idea. He told Fred to get a long, dry stick that would be light to handle; he took the rope from the pack-horse and made a loop with it, which he tied with a bunch of grass to the stick. Then he climbed the tree next to the one in which the cougar was hiding.

'The cougar was not very far from Jack: she could easily have jumped on him,' says Fred.

Jack manipulated the noose until he had looped it over the cougar's neck. Then he broke the grass connection and threw the end of the rope down to Fred, who gave a sharp jerk, so that 'the cougar fell over the limb and choked to death'!

What presumption it would be on my part, I thought, to label these people as of low intelligence!

I had yet another example of the quickness of reaction of the children one summer afternoon when we were out on a nature walk. We were on the road going down the

valley, and had just crossed the creek on a substantial wooden bridge without handrails. There was some wire netting round an empty shack and the boys found a willow-grouse suspended by the foot from this. It was newly dead and we were debating as to whether it had been roosting on the fence and caught its foot when taking off. Taffy scented the grouse and started leaping up, and Ralph threw the bird across the creek. It fell short, landing in the water, and Taffy leapt straight in after it. The current swept him off bobbing like a cork on the frothing water, but still fighting madly to get at the grouse, which floated just ahead of him. I was rooted to the bridge, but the children had all leapt down to the level of the water and were shrieking to Taffy on the other side of the stream. The grouse was held up by some overhanging boughs and Taffy grabbed it, but the current made off with him again. A huge fallen log spanned the stream and the puppy disappeared under it: we waited moments for him to reappear and Ralph said, shaking his head, "He'll be drowned for sure!"

Douglas was thinking faster than any of us. He was racing through the undergrowth on the near side of the stream, crashing through briar bushes and rotten branches in a cloud of flying leaves. About 100 yards downstream the creek swung to the left in a right-angled curve. Douglas reached this curve just in time to scramble down the bank, hook himself round a tree and lean out to grab Taffy by the scruff of the neck as the current swung him across the stream. There was a happy reunion and the children asked, "If Taffy had been drowned, should you have cried?"

"I might have," I replied, and Floyd promptly exclaimed, with his face beaming, "Gee! Let's throw him in again!"

When he was pulled out of the water, Taffy still had his grouse, and his prestige with the children advanced considerably. Dick said, "That little dog sure can swim!"

I had by now sent a report to Vancouver on the results of the courtesy campaign. Minnie and Viva were in the running for the prize. The boys, alas! had failed to maintain their initial enthusiasm, and Marjorie had been too outspoken on occasion. In the end it was decided by common agreement that Minnie had earned the prize. The bicycle arrived by the next Stage delivery, a pretty blue-and-white machine, not new, but newly painted—complete with pump and tool kit. Minnie was thrilled: everything was examined and commented on with wonder, especially the 'connection' in the pump, and after Minnie had had a few rides the others all queued up for turns. They scorned my offers of help and, with their usual independence and determination, just threw themselves on to the bicycle and rode it. A few days later Minnie described to me her last skid: "I was coming down the road too fast," she said, "and the bike went sideways and *bucked me off!*"

## Chapter XI

### FAREWELL TO BIG BAR CREEK

WE now learnt that the little log school house was to be replaced at the end of the term by a handsome new school built to Government specifications, with an attractive teacherage attached. A meeting was called to decide the location of the new school. In my opinion, the present location could not be improved upon, being far enough away from the road and with plenty of playing space around it. It was also conveniently placed to be within reach of the families using it. However, as most of the men in the valley were busy haying, there was a poor representation of the native people present, but the ranchers were there, and the Coldwells came down from Jesmord, and the Inspector, of course, attended, and the general feeling of the meeting was that the new school should be built further up the valley, as there were more young children at the top of the mountain.

The School Trustee told me that the School Board would have to deduct a proportion of my salary as rent for the new teacherage—by the present arrangement I occupied my log cabin rent free—and I replied half-jokingly, “I don’t suppose anyone would wish to pay for the privilege of living the sort of life I live in this valley.” The ranchers, who by reason of the Cameron Report, were heavily taxed for educational purposes, resented the seemingly extravagant amount which the Board was required to contribute towards the building of the school

house and teacherage. Funds for education in the various school districts were obtained from taxes on land owned, and not on income, and one of the ranchers, for instance, who owned hundreds of acres of land—much of which was unproductive mountain—had had to pay a school tax the previous year of \$1,500. It was quite understandable that the School Board should wish to recover some of their outlay on rent.

The next day the Inspector visited the school to assess the progress the children were making. At his inspection the previous year he had made appreciative comments and expressed satisfaction with the work done. But on this occasion he criticised my failure to conform to the *Programme of Studies* and disregarded the value there might be in my deviations from the prescribed curriculum. He asked, for instance, what unit the class had reached in spelling, and when I told him I was not following the units, but teaching the spelling of words used in compositions, he commented, "Spelling weak." He asked what I was doing in science, and I said I had substituted nature study. The windowsill was loaded with little jars containing labelled specimens of flowers and the nature diary was displayed on the table. He never looked at them. "What are you doing in written work?" he asked, and I was pleased to present the children's composition books, but he brushed them aside. He was referring to the 'Think and Do' books, which require the child to underline phrases and write 'Yes' or 'No' after statements. His comment was, "No written work." I had taken it for granted that he would have received a copy of the early correspondence I had had with the Department of

Education, and I never thought of showing him my letter from the Superintendent of Education.

When the holiday for the King's Birthday came round this year I decided that I would like to spend the day on the mountain in the hope of seeing a bear or a cougar, so I asked Melanie if she would lend me a horse so that Minnie and I could go out for the day. It was arranged that Cecil and Fred should guide us up the Coulee on the way to their camp: they were cutting trees for fence-rails and had a camp on top of the mountain. So on a lovely June morning the four of us set out, riding up the road to the foot of the mountain and then taking the trail up the Coulee. Taffy trotted behind us and the squirrels and chipmunks chattered all around. The boys were loping ahead, but Minnie and I lingered. I heard the crack of a twig and halted my horse. Minnie had not heard the sound, but she scanned the bushes and suddenly whispered, "Look! A porcupine! A great big one!" I looked in the direction in which she was pointing, but could see nothing except tree roots and branches. Taffy was scenting the air, but he, too, saw nothing unusual. We dismounted and Minnie picked up a stick and threw it towards a tree stump. Then I saw the porcupine: the whole stump seemed to move, and the porcupine ambled off. Taffy saw him at the same moment and leapt to attack: the next moment he yelped with pain and plunged up to the neck in the nearby ditch. His nose was a cushion of barbed quills three or four inches long. Minnie and I struggled to extract them and his squeals rent the air; the boys came galloping back to see what was the matter.

The porcupine had now disappeared, but the moment we released Taffy he was off in pursuit, and he disappeared completely in the thick grass. Cecil strode around, cautiously probing the bushes, with his rifle at the ready. A porcupine is not killed wantonly, because if a man is lost in the woods without a weapon the porcupine is his only source of meat: a sharp crack on the nose with a stick will kill the beast. But Cecil did not want to receive a slap from the porcupine's tail. We searched without success and then waited in vain for Taffy to reappear. It was about half an hour before he came back, with three more quills in his nose, and I suggested that he must have killed the porcupine, because I did not think he would have left it otherwise. But the boys said that was impossible: not even a cougar can kill a porcupine. After this episode, Taffy's fame spread, and the children began to realise that a terrier, though so small, is a sporting dog.

I enjoyed the ride over the mountaintop. In spite of the heat down in the valley, we were caught in a storm of hail and snow on the mountaintop, and had to shelter in a barn. Then we rode on through meadows, where we saw deer grazing in the distance, and we came on by another trail back to the road. On the way home Taffy caught and killed a jack rabbit.

One feature of life in the valley that it had taken me some time to get used to was the fact that it was not possible to go to church on Sunday. During the first week, when I heard the sweet tones of a bell floating down from the mountain, I had had a moment of pleased surprise. "Where is the church?" I had asked, only to learn that

the bell whose note I had heard was hung round the neck of one of the horses. My own parish church was at Ashcroft, eighty miles away: there were several Anglican families between Clinton and the Fraser River, and the parson and his wife and little daughter made the long trip out to visit us during the summer.

One Friday afternoon towards the end of June I had unexpected visitors—two young women driving a van labelled 'The Sunday School by Post.' They were very welcome guests. They camped by the creek, and the children—always full of curiosity when strangers came down the valley—gathered round to talk to them. On the Sunday afternoon they held a Sunday school class in the school and distributed to the children coloured pictures and little magazines, and I hoped they would come again the following year.

My two years of grace were now almost over; I must decide whether or not I wished to attend a Canadian Summer School in order to have my Certificate extended, with authority to continue teaching in B.C. However, on the last mail day of term I received a letter from the School Board terminating my employment under them: I had received an 'unsatisfactory Inspector's Report.' I was hurt and disappointed, and frustrated in my plans for the children, but I was happy at the thought of going back to England to see my father again.

We had a Farewell Party at the end of June. It started with a treasure hunt for a silver dollar which I had hidden under the root of a plant that afternoon. I gave the children an area of search approximately fifty yards square, most of it covered with sage brush, and I did not



think there was a chance of anyone actually finding the dollar—though the prize would go to the nearest one. But Phillip, who had ridden all day to come over from the Circle H Ranch, followed a system combing the area in parallel, straight lines until he noticed a plant which was damp at the roots. He was right: I had watered the plant before replacing it.

There was to be a softball match in the evening, School *versus* Visitors, but this was delayed. The ball was lost. We searched everywhere and at last started play with an old ball which came out of its skin whenever it was hit. The children sewed it up with string twice and then Pete 'fixed' it by unravelling a thread of copper wire from the wireless aerial and sewing the skin with that. The mosquitoes were so thick that we had to burn a greenwood fire in each corner of the pitch in the hope that the smoke would drive them away. The game went on until it was so dark that I could not see the players, yet they still hit and caught the ball. Then, of course, we danced. I shall never hear another radio Hill Bally programme without visualising that little log school house with the gay and colourful dancers; the fiddlers fiddling madly; Big Dick swinging Dolly off her feet; the babies sleeping on the desks—till the light of dawn spreads over the grey mountains and the sound of voices and hoofbeats die away in the distance.

On the last afternoon, after the children had all gone home, 'Old Johnny rode down to see me.

"Goodbye!" he said as we shook hands. "You're the best teacher we ever had in this valley, and my children love you."

And that was a tribute which I have kept in my heart.

## POSTSCRIPT

I WENT home to England in July, but I was back again in September. Canada still drew me like a magnet. My urge, now that I had been initiated, was to go north—to the Yukon, for instance, or the Great Bear Lake—to experience the sort of life described by Jack London in those stories which I had devoured in my teens. So my next schoolmarm adventure was among the children of the Arctic—little Indians and Eskimos at Akavik in the Mackenzie River Delta.

It was three years before I came out of the north.

In July, on my way across Canada for the last time, I visited the valley once more to say goodbye to the children of Big Bar Creek. I found many changes. The old log school house was now a bunk-house for Johnny and his hunting clients, and Melanie and little Minnie lived in my teacherage. Arthur's picture still decorated the wall, though it was faded and smoke-browned. Jack and Mannie were dead—a double sacrifice to the god whisky. (The winter after I left they were driving a car home one night: the car ran off the road into a lake and Mannie was drowned. Jack managed to struggle to the bank, but died of exposure.) Marjorie, unwed, was the mother of two children. She had been fond of Jack, I knew; perhaps her world crumpled when he died.

More than half my former pupils had not had a day's schooling since I left, for the simple reason that the new school was inaccessible to them, being eight miles further

up the mountain. Since their parents were not literate, correspondence courses were of no use to them. I thought that these children must have felt themselves deserted. It is under such conditions that childhood naughtinesses develop into grosser attempts to get even with society.

Canada is awake to the necessity of conserving her natural resources: human material is the most valuable resource she has.

